



Evaluation of the FE Reform Programme 2015

Research report

October 2017

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1. Introduction

Context

The Further Education Reform programme encompasses a range of regulatory, funding, and policy changes to change the focus, efficiency, and efficacy of Government-funded further education and skills learning in England. This programme of reform began early on in Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government with the publication of Skills for Sustainable Growth (BIS, November 2010), a strategy documents detailing the underpinning principles and early ideas behind the Further Education Reform Programme:

- Fairness – Focussing funding on those who need it most by prioritising basic skills and provision to help unemployed people into work.
- Responsiveness – Greater responsibility for identifying learning needs placed on employers and individuals.
- Freedom – Removing centrally imposed Government targets, control and regulation to increase standards, performance and innovation.

“The scale and extent of the reforms set out in this strategy should not be underestimated. Our aim is to shift profoundly the balance between the state, businesses and individuals.” Skills for Sustainable Growth, November 2010.

“FE colleges are the great unheralded triumph of our education system. But their capacity to innovate has been limited ... we will free colleges to innovate and excel.” John Hayes MP (then Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning), The craft so long to learn: Skills and their Place in Modern Britain, RSA, 26 October 2010.

Skills for Sustainable Growth, as well as providing underpinning principles, set out priority areas for investment in further education and skills over the course of the 2010-2015 Parliament and beyond. Reforms that followed Skills for Sustainable Growth were developed in two further key policy documents over the Further Education Reform Programme period, ‘New Challenges, New Chances’ (BIS, December 2011) and ‘Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills’ (DfE, BIS, April 2013)

‘New Challenges, New Chances – Further Education and Skills Reform Plan: Building a World Class System’ was published following a period of public and stakeholder consultation to detail how the Government would be supporting the further education and skills sector to meet the objectives and principles of the reform programme, with the aim of creating a skills system which is better able to meet the

needs of employers and learners. The key measures set out by Government included:

Students at the heart of the FE and skills system – improving the quality and availability of information available to help make learners make informed decisions about the learning opportunities available to them and prioritising government funding where it can have the most impact on opportunities for learners.

First class advice delivered by the National Careers Service – The National Careers Service in England (launched in 2012) provides professional, independent careers advice through an online and telephone helpline offer available to everyone aged 13 and over and a local face to face offer for adults over 19 (or 18+ if on out of work benefits) including adults in custody.

A ladder of opportunity of comprehensive vocational education and training programmes – through progression routes which are clearer, simpler and more flexible.

Excellence in teaching and learning – New Challenges, New Chances established the independent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning to identify and promote innovative and effective approaches in the planning, delivery and assessment of vocational learning. The commission reported in July 2012. The Independent Review of Professionalism in the Further Education and Skills Workforce, led by Lord Lingfield, was also established and contributed to reducing regulatory burdens on further education and skills providers and the government.

Alongside the reform programme, Ofsted introduced a new Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills in September 2012. This framework included replaced 'satisfactory' as the definition for grade 3 judgements with 'requires improvement' and introduced a discrete headline judgement for 'quality of teaching, learning and assessment'.

Relevant and focused learning programmes and qualifications – reforms to simplify and raise awareness of the Qualifications and Credit Framework were established under New Challenges, New Chances. Alongside these reforms, the Department for Education changed the way 16-19 learners were funded to an individual study programme approach and conducted major reforms to the curriculum and regulations around GCSE and A Level teaching and assessment.

Strategic governance for a dynamic further education sector – to help further education colleges thrive in a new, more flexible and responsive skills system, Government removed central controls and regulations placed on college governing bodies enabling governors to have more control and autonomy over its composition

and relationships with local partners such as Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Freedoms and flexibilities – includes a package of reforms to simplify the further education sector landscape, reduce bureaucracy and remove regulation.

Over the reform period, Government has simplified the FE landscape by reducing the number of publicly-funded national sector bodies. The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), Lifelong Learning UK, Standards and Verification UK, Qualifications and Curriculum and Development Agency, and Regional Development Agencies have been closed over the reform period and the Skills Funding Agency and UK Commission for Employment and Skills have been scaled back.

The Government has also sought to reduce bureaucracy across the sector so that providers can focus more on delivery than on compliance. The Coalition Government removed central targets for providers in its first year in office. Further reductions in bureaucracy include removing ‘outstanding’ providers from the Ofsted inspection cycle, reducing the volume of data returns, simplifying the funding system and single account management with the Skills Funding Agency. Finally, the Education Act 2011 delivered a key part of the further education reform programme in removing many of the statutory duties placed on colleges and college governing bodies such as freedoms over instruments and articles and repealing statutory reporting duties.

Funding priorities through a simplified funding system – includes key proposals to introduce a single funding methodology for adult skills, radically simplify qualification funding rates and reduce the number of direct funding contracts through minimum contract levels. Alongside these reforms, Local Enterprise Partnerships have been provided with FE Capital budgets.

Quality assurance, transparency and data management – includes a package of reforms to create competition within the sector and incentivise providers to respond to the needs of employers and learners with the intention of replacing Government-led quality systems with market forces and minimum standards.

Global FE – recognised the place of the further education and skills sector in the global market place for skills and training.

An evaluation of New Challenges, New Chances¹ conducted in 2013 showed that the further education reform programme was already beginning to impact on the

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248709/bis-13-1234_evaluation-of-new-challenges-new-chances-further-education-and-skills-reform-plan.pdf

sector with 83 per cent of providers involved in the research reporting that the reform programme had affected their organisation's business strategy and planning to some extent.

Rigour and Responsiveness, published by BIS in April 2013, updated the Government's reform programme priorities for the sector, recognising the growth in apprenticeships, the sector's increased focus on the quality of teaching and learning as well as progress made to date in the reform of qualifications and systems. It had six main priorities for further reform:

Raising standards – through the introduction of a new sector-owned support body and a new Further Education Commissioner to intervene and take action where provision is judged inadequate alongside a new administration process for failing colleges.

Reforming apprenticeships – in response to the review conducted by Doug Richard² so that employers play a much greater role in the setting of standards for apprenticeships and have far greater purchasing power.

Creating traineeships – a new programme for unemployed young people to gain the work preparation and English and maths skills required to gain an apprenticeship or enter the labour market.

Meaningful qualifications – signalling reforms to cease government funding for poor quality qualifications.

Funding improving responsiveness – reinforced the Government's principle of delivering value for money through the further education and skills system by funding provision which was relevant to the needs of employers and is of high quality. Reforms in this area include the introduction of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans for individuals and direct employer funding through the Employer Ownership Pilots (EOP) scheme. Alongside, funding conditions and requirements for young people to undertake GCSE English and maths qualifications were introduced to improve the rigour of programmes of study in the sector.

Better information and data – builds on previously stated government intentions to improve the quality of information available to learners and employers about the availability and quality of further education and skills provision in their local areas. This part of the reform programme committed the government to open data to

² The Richard Review of Apprenticeships' – Doug Richard (November 2012).

encourage the development of third party applications to present and analyse data for key local stakeholder such as Local Enterprise Partnerships.

“Since 2010 we have made progress in strengthening our skills system. The bureaucracy and target culture that was stifling colleges and providers, reducing their ability to respond to the needs of employers and learners, has been stripped away.”

Matthew Hancock MP, then Minister for Skills, Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills, Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, April 2013.

The review programme involves a wide range of stakeholders across the further education and skills sector including Government funding agencies, regulators as well as leaders, managers and practitioners across the diverse range of providers – indicating the scale of the challenges the programme seeks to address. Taken collectively, all partners have, to varying degrees, established new ways of working in order to meet the reform programmes objectives, adapt the learning and skills offer to employers and learners, and change the nature and function of relationships with other sector partners.

Summary of key policies

Changes to the funding system

Prior to 2013/2014 there were two principal funding streams for adult skills. These were merged into a single Adult Skills Budget under which a new system of simplified funding bands and rates³ which replaced the over 6,000 rates that existed previously. The reform programme has also reconfigured public funding entitlements available to learners, including options for co-funding and loans for learners aged 24 or older for learning at levels 2 and 3-4 respectively.

As part of Government’s commitment to put greater purchasing power into the hands of learners, 24+ Advanced Learning Loans were introduced in 2013/14 to help learners meet the costs of a level 3 or 4 course in full or in part.

Following recommendations of Professor Alison Wolf’s review of vocational education for 14-19 year olds in 2011, funding for 16-19 year olds changed in 2013/14 from a per-qualification model to a per-learner model, bringing about the introduction of 16-19 study programmes. Study programmes were introduced to provider learning and skills providers with the flexibility to tailor programmes to meet

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sfa-funding-rates>

the aspirations of students while ensuring that the qualifications that were on offer provided good progression opportunities to further learning and employment.

Freeing providers from central government control

The Education Act 2011 removed a number of statutory requirements from college governing bodies in order to provide colleges with the freedoms and flexibilities needed to better respond to the needs of their communities. Under the reform programme, college Governors have been provided with greater powers to set the future direction of their institution as well as obtaining powers from the Secretary of State to dissolve their institution if they wish. College Corporations also gained powers to amend their articles of association without the need to seek permission from the Government.

Under New Challenges, New Chances, the Government removed centrally-imposed targets from Departments and funding agencies and reduced the number of data and information collection requirements. Another strand of this theme was the streamlining of sector organisations. This included the abolition of some bodies, such as BECTA and the Regional Development Agencies, the merging and scaling back of others and providing the sector with ownership of the main improvement body, the Education and Training Foundation.

Removing restrictions to enable new ways of working

Key to the success of the Government's skills strategy are providers who are accountable to their local communities. Part of meeting these aims include providing greater powers to governing bodies thereby providing colleges with greater autonomy to plan and deliver provision with greater partnership with employers.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Alongside the introduction of a revised common inspection framework in September 2012 which placed a much greater emphasis on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Ofsted's inspections, the independent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning undertook work to identify how providers could deliver high quality vocational learning with classroom learners and apprentices and part of the Education and Training Foundation's role is to oversee the implementation of its recommendations.

New requirements for GCSE English and maths

Under the reform programme, the further education and skills sector has been required to play its part in increasing the numbers of young people and adults who

achieve GCSE standards of English and maths. International evidence, most notably the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) published by the OECD in 2012, found that England is below the OECD average for numeracy and literacy, ranking 17/24 and 12/24 respectively. Since September 2014, all learners aged 16-19 who did not achieve A*-C GCSEs in English and maths at school must continue to study these subjects, including apprentices. In response to concerns from the sector and Ofsted that there was a shortage of good English and maths teachers to deliver this extra requirement, the Government, through a new FE Workforce Strategy, provided £30million for bursaries and grants to attract teachers into the sector and support providers to recruit.

Changes to Apprenticeships

The Richard Review of Apprenticeships (2012) signalled the start of reforms to apprenticeships to make them much more relevant and responsive to the needs of employers. Providing employers with greater ownership over apprenticeship standards and assessment means that apprenticeships can become a vital tool to meet the demands of the labour market. As a result, employer-led Trailblazers are developing and implementing new, simplified standards and assessment plans.

Use of technology

The Government established the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group was established in January 2013 to advise the Department for Business Innovation and Skills on practical ways to increase and better utilise learning digital technology. Following the report, Government has worked with sector bodies such as Jisc, the Skills Funding Agency, the Education and Training Foundation and Ofsted to ensure that the necessary support structures and infrastructure is in place to enable greater use of online and digital learning opportunities across sector.

Introduction of the National Careers Service

The National Careers Service was established by Government in April 2012. It is manage and funded through the Skills Funding Agency. It provides professional, independent careers advice through an online and telephone helpline offer available to everyone aged 13 and over and a local face to face offer for adults over 19 (or 18+ if on out of work benefits) including adults in custody.

Research aims and objectives

In the context of numerous upcoming changes in, or affecting, the FE sector (including the Government's spending review, area reviews, the introduction of

Apprenticeship Levies for employers, and changes to English and Maths) it is crucial for BIS to have an independent and rigorous evaluation of the previous initiatives introduced by the Coalition Government as part of the FE Reform programme. This evaluation explores providers' experiences of the FE Reform programme to understand the impact it has had to date so that BIS can develop an evidence base to best inform decisions which will further affect future operations of the sector.

The evaluation provides understanding of how, and to what extent, providers have implemented changes as a result of the reforms and how these changes have evolved in response to the changing context. It also assesses the impact of changes on the types of learners engaging in FE, learner experiences and outcomes, the quality of teaching and learning, the types of opportunities on offer, and relationships with employers and other stakeholders (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships).

This evaluation builds upon two previous significant pieces of research into the implementation and progress of the Reform programme including initial qualitative research 2010 which explored providers' plans for implementing changes as a result of the reforms and a 2013 evaluation which explored progress to date.

Method

The research comprised the following elements:

- **ILR analysis:** detailed analysis was undertaken using Individual Learner Records (ILR) data from 2009/10 onwards to test hypotheses relating to: who is undertaking learning; which employers providers are working with; whether quality has been affected by reductions in funding; and whether FE is concentrating more on STEM aims.
- **Qualitative interviews with stakeholders:** 10 in-depth interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders which informed the development of all the research tools used for the evaluation to ensure the issues and themes explored met BIS's objectives and reflected the experiences and understanding of the sector.
- **Quantitative survey of FE providers:** a telephone survey of 325 providers was undertaken to explore the views and experiences of a representative sample of providers to examine key issues and to identify impacts of the Reform programme.
- **Qualitative interviews with FE providers:** 50 in-depth interviews with providers were undertaken to explore their experiences in more detail and to identify links between what changes have been made and why and how they had their eventual impact.

- **Case study research:** A longitudinal case study approach followed-up six providers who took part in NIACE's call for evidence consultation. Case studies explored the specific challenges to, and opportunities arising from, the expansion of English and maths GCSE provision.

The specific policies that were explored in the primary fieldwork were agreed with BIS during the research design phase.

A fuller description of method is provided in a technical report supplementary to this report.

The report

The report which follows has a sequence of following chapters:

- Most of these chapters, *Chapters 5 to 14*, focus on research findings in relation to individual strands of the FE Reform programme.
- Before that, three other chapters have a more general character:
 - *Chapter 2* offers an overview of the findings from succeeding chapters – drawing out key themes or 'messages' which apply to, or derive from, all or several of the Reform programme's different strands.
 - *Chapter 3* presents a detailed statistical analysis of data from the government's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) system which records all publicly-funded learning episodes. The analysis, of several recent years' data, seeks to detect impacts of FE Reform on the profile of learners and learning across England.
 - *Chapter 4* sets out findings derived from the primary research with providers which are not specific to one or other of the reform strands but, more generally, concern the FE Reform programme in its entirety.

In reading the report, a number of points may be helpful.

First, in the chapters (5 to 14) which present findings from quantitative and qualitative research – that is, from the telephone survey of, and depth interviews with, providers – the aim is to present statistics on key aspects of particular issues and, alongside, to supply greater depth on the same issues derived from more free-ranging discussions with providers. These chapters also have a consistent approach such that the views of different types of provider – FE colleges, private training providers, and 'other' providers (including local authorities and charitable organisations) – are distinguished. The premise in doing this is that the three broad types of provider have differing functions, sizes and structures, motivations, and

modes of operating which, a priori, are likely to lead to different perceptions of FE reform, to their being differently impacted, and to different responses to those impacts.

Second, although, as above, many chapters focus on individual strands of reform, it is not, of course, the case that the strands are wholly separate from each other. For example, funding changes, while discussed in individual chapters, are relevant to other matters, such as the quality of teaching and learning or changes to apprenticeships. New policy on maths and English GCSE is significant to apprenticeship and other learning provision. Offering apprenticeships interacts with how providers approach partnership with employers and local organisations and agencies.

Because of such interactions, research material presented in one chapter may also be relevant to others. The report has not, therefore, sought to restrict a particular argument made by providers in depth interviews (supported with verbatim quotes) or particular survey data to appearing only once in the report.

Finally, a small reporting point concerns one of the types of provider referred to above. As noted, a number of providers other than FE colleges and private training providers were interviewed in the study's telephone survey and its in-depth interviews. In the report's discussions of findings, there is potential for confusion between the use of 'other providers' as a general term (eg. 'Three other providers said') and specific reference to the particular group of providers. For this reason, where the report describes responses from the particular group of providers which are not FE colleges or private training companies, the convention is used of putting 'other' in this context in inverted commas (eg. 'Five 'other' providers said').

2. Overview

Introduction

This chapter of the report sets out a number of broad or general themes which are apparent from consideration of the statistical and descriptive analysis which further chapters contain.

Those further chapters report a wide variety of views and behaviours from different types of providers on a substantial number of strands of reform. Given this variety, and with nuances and conflicting positions apparent, absolute consensus of views is largely absent. The aim here, therefore, is to identify some general propositions which the balance of evidence from the research supports as a framework within which more detailed – and sometimes contrary – findings can be considered.

‘Theory’ versus ‘practice’: the reform challenge for providers

A very basic question for the research, and one which may be critical to the long term success of the reform agenda, is whether providers are generally supportive of reform?

A basic message from the research is that providers (whilst sometimes somewhat wearied by the history of change in the sector) *are* broadly supportive of reform and expressed determination to see the sector through its transformation. The underlying principles of the reform – efficiency, quality, and market responsiveness – are widely supported and providers are working hard to respond to the shift in policy and funding.

This is so despite the fact that reform is, of course, extremely challenging – to organisational culture, to financial budgets and management, and to delivery structures and processes. The scale of challenge is varied for different organisations and institutions but generally, tends to be greater for general FE colleges which have been required to re-shape large-scale and broad provision, to adjust complex organisational structures, and to identify and adopt new market orientations. The challenge, whilst not minor, is lesser for more tightly-focussed and usually much smaller private training companies which, because of those attributes, find adaptation to change to be a less complex matter. A consistent pattern, both in statistical survey analysis and in the contributions of different groups of providers in depth interviews, is that FE colleges more frequently report awareness of reforms, impact from reforms, and change in delivery in response to reforms.

Supportiveness of reform is also despite the fact that providers have observed various downsides or unforeseen consequences of various aspects of FE policy change. Essentially, they accept the basic premises and principles of reform and have a deep desire to see a new more stable FE ‘settlement’ establish itself – but are not convinced that various aspects of reform have been fully worked out and believe that some further adjustments (discussed in more detail below) will be necessary.

Reform in a wider context

A further observation from the views of providers is that the suite of individual reform policies discussed in this report are not always perceived as having clear cut external boundaries. Providers are very conscious of the wider political landscape which, at a time of economic difficulties, has required spending cuts across most government departments. These cuts have been accompanied by an ideological shift from public spending to the transfer of some costs to employers and learners.

Thus, the overall reduction in budget, as well as more particular changes, such as the shift towards funding of 16 to 18 year olds and the introduction of loans to support some learning by older learners, forms a constant backdrop to observations on many reforms. And other changes, including changes to Ofsted inspection processes and the simplification of qualifications, also affect providers’ responses to the varied strands of reform which are considered in this report.

Perceptions of the ‘internal’ components of the FE reform programme

The reform programme is seen as having interactions with both a wider policy context and with other changes which are not formally within the scope of this research, and the internal components of the programme are not seen as equally distinctive or as equally significant. Essentially, therefore providers perceive a ‘hierarchy of impact’.

Though this factor varies between providers, some reform strands – such as the introduction of adult learning loans, changes to apprenticeship, the focus on GCSE maths and English, and the fact that funding is more readily available for young learners – which are specific and targeted, are clearly recognised by providers. They have immediate impact and demand an immediate response if institutions of learning and training are going to survive and prosper.

Other reforms, which are more ‘contextual’ – including freeing organisations from central government control, removing restrictions on partnerships, and the

introduction of the National Careers Service – are less consistently seen as clear drivers of change. They may create a climate in which other more direct reforms can be applied but are not consistently seen as tangible reforms which have a direct linear connection to specific actions undertaken by providers.

In some cases, what may look from a government perspective as liberating, may look less so from a provider's point of view. For example, 'freeing organisations from government control' and 'removing restrictions on partnership' may, in principle, be liberating organisations. But, in conjunction with cuts in FE budgets, they may actually mean costs, in terms of substantial inputs of time and effort, to re-build the organisation's funding base and to establish new markets and collaborations. These costs, at least in the short term, may be perceived as outweighing the benefits of de-restriction.

In a further case, that of simplification of the funding system, the argument of some providers is that simplification from the government's point of view is not necessarily simplification from the provider point of view – the reform constitutes a transfer of activity out of the Skills Funding Agency and into providers as, for example, systems to process student loans and invoice for employer contributions require to be implemented.

And with the introduction of the National Careers Service, providers often had little knowledge of the operations of the service. As part of the reform programme, it was sometimes seen as peripheral or, where providers had knowledge of it, it was often viewed as a weaker mode of delivering Information, Advice and Guidance, particularly to young learners, than the systems which the new service replaced.

Inter-relationship of reforms and unintended consequences

As above, not all the programme's individual reforms are seen as equally direct in driving change. Further than this, however, there are links between them which have generated impacts which were perhaps unforeseen. Examples of this include:

- Early application of loan funding to advanced and higher apprenticeships was dropped as a result of low take-up. However, some providers suggest that this period has had a lingering negative effect on participation in apprenticeship at these levels.
- Some providers suggest that freedom from government control is limited when 'directive' policy – for example, to deliver English and maths GCSEs within learning programmes – persists.

- Some providers suggest that the introduction of the National Careers Service has weakened the availability of impartial advice to young people and that this, in turn, has led to reduced demand for vocational and technical courses as predominantly schools-based advice militates in favour of school-based routes (in particular for academic qualifications).
- The insertion of a GCSE maths and English requirement into apprenticeship is reported as having weakened demand for apprenticeship from some employers who do not see time spent on an 'academic' element as a necessary component in development of the skills they need.

Thus, a further general point which emerges from the study is that the impacts of reforms are not always self-contained; one particular reform does not produce one particular set of impacts. Rather, the reform programme may, in some instances, act as a cat's-cradle of initiatives where pulling one string in favour of initiative A can pull other strings, initiatives B, C, etc., in unanticipated directions.

A work in progress

It was noted above that providers do not necessarily see the reforms as the 'finished article' and foresee that some aspects of the programme may need adjustment if they are to fully succeed. The likelihood of adjustment will ultimately depend on the degree of flexibility which the government proves willing to display, but some particular issues which significant numbers of providers see as problematic and in need of attention include:

- *The introduction of a good GCSE pass in maths and English as a condition of learning programme.* Providers suggest:
 - (1) This narrows entry for people who are put off by the requirement to study qualifications which they have previously failed or who, in the opinion of providers, are simply incapable of this achievement (at least within the time available).
 - (2) That this has led some private providers to exclude some learners who are judged as unlikely to gain the required grades and some providers report that progression to Level 3 vocational courses which would otherwise be possible can be held back by the need to pass these formal examinations at the required level.
 - (3) That some employers avoid some learning programmes because they do not require this GCSE achievement from learners whom they see as otherwise quite capable of gaining the skill levels they need.
 - (4) That the academic nature of the requirement makes possession of traditional classroom settings and teaching approaches a necessity – a factor which favours some providers and drives others towards sub-contracting the maths and English requirement.

Overall, the view of providers with these concerns is that developing English and maths to an adequate level by a 'functional skills' approach is preferable to driving all learners towards formal GCSE examinations.

- *The introduction of Adult Learning Loans to fund Level 3 learning.* Falls in numbers of learners at this level following the introduction of loans shows that this policy was unpopular with many learners. Some providers report that take-up of loans in respect of some types of provision (such as Access to Higher Education Courses) was good, that they are engaging more pro-actively with the policy as it becomes more embedded in the funding landscape, and that learner resistance may be diminishing. However, other providers report low learner interest in loans, particularly from members of disadvantaged communities, and that the policy has reduced the scale and scope of Level 3 provision and overall participation. They fear longer term reduction in participation, particularly should the policy be extended into the 19 to 24 years age bracket.
- Many providers report an increasing focus on their apprenticeship offer in response to government policy to further strengthen apprenticeship's position as the key format for vocational skills development. However, there is also *concern that government targets for apprenticeship numbers are very ambitious.* Providers foresee that meeting policy requirements which potentially conflict – increasing apprenticeship volumes, maintaining and improving quality, and introducing new employer funding systems (with SME participation seen as at particular risk) – will be a significant challenge for the apprenticeship system as a whole and for individual providers.
- A further problem perceived by many providers is one which has persisted for many years and may, they feel, be exacerbated by the reform programme. That problem is essentially that FE vocational provision is not given an equal opportunity to compete with the schools-based sixth-form route. The context, of course, is the high social premium which parents and young people place on the A Level-to-University pathway and schools' reliance on this pathway as a criterion of their own success. In provider eyes, this perpetuates the 'psychological' disadvantage of vocational options but disadvantage is seen as being deepened by preferential funding arrangements for schools, by raising of the school leaving age, and by a weak, biased Information, Advice, and Guidance service which is not able to sufficiently promote the benefits of vocational learning to young people.
- A final overall perception of providers is simply that they are running hard to stand still. They believe that they have performed well to date in implementing change and in maintaining provision and standards with dwindling funds – but many wonder how long this will continue if further pressures, particularly financial ones, are applied.

The scale of change and adaptation

A further ‘overview’ point which emerges very clearly from the study findings is simply that the scale and variety of impact on providers is, in a practical sense, huge.

Providers report a very wide range of inter-linked adaptations, including:

- Substantial staffing changes – job losses in some posts which have become redundant, recruitment (often with difficulty) to other posts (for example, maths and English teachers and financial administrators) which have become necessary, re-training and re-allocation of staff, and the creation of new roles.
- Greater use of new technology to reduce costs.
- Introduction of new management information systems and new financial systems (for example, to administer student loans).
- Internal restructuring with elimination or reduction of some departments and introduction or expansion of others.
- Development of external collaborations or sub-contract arrangements (with occasional suggestions that the FE sector may be subject to future mergers in order to supply types of teaching or learning which it is uneconomic for smaller individual institutions to deliver).
- General re-balancing of provision and customer segments to minimise the cost base and maximise income streams.

As noted above, providers see a fundamental challenge (one which they believe that, broadly, they have met to date) of maintaining quality through a period of widespread change and of adjustment of their traditional operating models and processes.

Continuation of existing directions of travel

Some elements of the reform programme were reported as being consistent with existing philosophies or directions of travel.

One particular case concerns the ‘new ways of working with other organisations’ strand of the reform agenda. Many providers reported that they had an increasing focus on working locally with employers, employer representative groups, and with their Local Enterprise Partnership. Whilst the reform agenda, particularly through its impact on funding, was frequently reported as an accelerant of, or stimulus to, this change, it was also reported by substantial numbers of providers that this was a route that they were already following and that their existing pre-reform networks were substantial. This was particularly true of some private providers whose whole business is based on employer-derived income but also of general FE colleges

which have delivered apprenticeships and other programmes requiring work experience over many years and which have traditionally delivered significant amounts of training, bespoke provision in some cases, for local companies and their staff.

A second case concerns the reform programme's concern to see providers develop the use of technology to support traditional teaching methods for efficiency as well as for pedagogic reasons. Providers again frequently reported that they had made substantial advances in their application of new technologies in recent years but also that those advances in some cases pre-dated the reform programme and would have developed in the programme's absence – driven by the scale of adoption of new technologies by learners and by the opening-up of new technological possibilities at least as much as by policy intervention.

The general point is that, in some cases, FE reform was running with the flow of change and was an accelerant, not necessarily the sole catalyst, of change.

Is the reform programme working?

The most fundamental question for the research reported here is whether, collectively, its insights show that the reform programme – in as far as can be judged from the reactions of providers to the programme and from ILR data – is meeting its objectives.

Broadly, although there are many challenges and problems and some specific failures, the research demonstrates that the FE system is adjusting in directions required by the new policies – providers are alert to changing economic needs and are increasingly market-oriented, the balance of provision and the learner profile are changing in favour of the provision and profile which policy deems to be most important, and providers are making the internal adjustments and developing the external arrangements which, in combination, reduced budgets and the new policy focusses demand.

3. FE Reforms: ILR analysis

Key points

A detailed review of data on participation contained in the government's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) system is reported in this chapter.

The data used is that covering the period 2009/2010 to 2013/2014 which saw the introduction of numerous features of the FE Reform programme.

Some limitations in the data are noted. The main ones are that some data in the earlier years which are subjected to analysis is of lower quality than in the most recent years; and that changes in ILR recording procedures over the period have introduced inconsistencies between different years' data.

Whilst recognising these limitations, the data has sought to test four main propositions:

- That the profile of FE learners has changed to reflect government policies.
- That providers are working with more employers from target groups.
- That reductions in funding have affected the quality of FE provision.
- That FE is concentrating more on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Taking each of these propositions in turn, analysis suggests that, in respect of **the learner profile**:

- The general context is that overall numbers of learners fell during the period studied.
- Against this background, the number of young learners aged 18 or below fell by significantly less than the number of learners aged 25 or over.
- The proportion of FE learners self-identifying as having a learning difficulty, disability, or health problem rose significantly over the period. This rise may have resulted from changes in medical diagnosis or shifts in attitudes but, allowing for that, the data suggests that, at the least, FE has maintained its ability to accommodate people with these disadvantages.
- Whilst, as above, the overall number of FE learners declined, the rate of decline of learners living in the most deprived postcode areas of England was significantly less than average – hence, the proportion of all FE learners from the most deprived areas has increased over the period.

- Patterns of change in relation to levels of study are complex – varying both between levels and, year-on-year, within levels such that some years' increases are followed by the next years' decreases (and vice versa). In a recent period, however, 2011/12 to 2013/14, the broad trend was that learner numbers increased at the 'bottom' end, Entry Level and Level 1, but fell at Levels 2 to 4.
- In relation to different types of provider, the number of post-16 learners in schools rose between 2009/10 and 2013/14 but fell in all other types of FE provider – with private and 'other' providers losing greater proportions of their learner numbers than FE colleges.

Thus, in relation to public policy and the profile of learners:

- Changes to FE funding resulting from policy (and, perhaps, wider changes in the education and skills 'landscape') have played a part in reducing overall numbers learning in FE.
- Within this, policy change has:
 - influenced the age balance of learners to the detriment of those aged 25 or older
 - increased the *relative* proportion of FE learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (numbers have declined less amongst this group)
 - worked to encourage participation by learners at lower qualification levels rather than at intermediate levels
 - worked in favour of the youngest learners being educated in schools rather than in FE colleges or other non-school learning environments.

In respect of the second proposition, that FE providers are working with more employers from target groups:

- ILR data to test this hypothesis is not of high quality and year-on-year analysis has strong limitations.
- However, key policy objectives are that SMEs should increasingly be engaged in staff training and that more FE training funded by employers should be at Level 3 or higher.
- Data does not allow reliable time-series analysis of SME engagement. However, it does show that a much greater share of FE learners than of the workforce as a whole work for SMEs. This may reflect the fact that large employers are more able to train internally but, at least, shows that SMEs are very significant contributors to the population of learners in employment.
- Data is not wholly consistent over time but assuming that inconsistency is unbiased, it suggests that, over the period analysed, there has been a modest

increase in learning at Level 3 by employed learners at the expense of learning by employed learners at Level 2 – in broad alignment with the policy objective.

The third proposition is that reductions in funding have affected the quality of provision:

- ‘Quality of provision’ is a complex matter in respect of which the ILR system does not have a direct measurement indicator. Two proxies are used instead. These are achievement or continuation of learning aims and the duration of study periods (in the latter case, the assumption being that longer durations are associated with higher quality).
- Broadly, data suggests marginal declines in the proportion of learners achieving or continuing between 2009/10 and 2013/14 (an average annual decline of -0.9 per cent).
- The data in respect of duration is complex and inter-related to different levels of study and to different types of provider. Overall, the median duration of learning decreased over the analysis period but this overall decline is associated with a significant increase in the proportion of Entry Level and Level 1 learning which is, on average, shorter than learning at higher Levels. Median durations increased at Level 2 and remained stable at Level 3.

The overall assessment is that, in as much as achievement rates and duration of learning are adequate proxies for quality, there has been no substantial change in the quality of learning over the period of analysis.

The fourth proposition is that **FE is concentrating more on STEM subjects of study**:

- ILR analysis shows that the proportion of STEM learning at Level 2 or above as a proportion of all learning at Level 2 or above rose modestly (by 3 percentage points) between 2009/10 and 2013/14.
- This overall result was generated by lower decline in STEM learning at Levels 2 and 3 than were other subject areas and by a very large increase (from a low base) in STEM learning at Level 4 between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Generally, thus, an increasing focus on learning in STEM subjects is appreciable but, other than recently at Level 4, not huge.

Introduction

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) details the structure of the further education population funded through government. It describes the learners and the aims they

take each year and comprises, after validation, the best, most consistent record of those who participate in further education each year.

At the time of writing, a validated ILR record was available up to the academic year 2013/14. By its nature, the analysis undertaken for this study is therefore historical and the trends in the learner and aim profile lags those of the real world. However, there is still value in mapping changes at the population level that happened between the academic years 2009/10 to 2013/14. This period saw the introduction of numerous targeting policies which sought to fund areas of learning where need was judged to be greatest. An analysis of trends in the population of learners and the aims of learning they pursue provides comparative evidence as to the impact of these policies.

Impact is emphasised on purpose. This study is not intended to identify causation i.e. it does not measure the direct contribution which specific policies made to changes in the learner population or in the aims those learners pursued. There are several fascinating and important econometric studies that do attribute levels of causation to participation in further education. Some of these are cited in this chapter to help explain or contextualise some of the changes discussed.

Policies relevant to the period covered in the ILR study

Instead, this study takes a structural view of further education, maps some of the changes in key ILR variables, and compares changes in the light of policy developments. Given the time period of the study, the major changes in policy that potentially had a direct impact on the numbers of learners and aims were:

- Further Education Loans were introduced in April 2013. The target learner group for the policy was those aged 24 or older in aims at Level 3 or 4. The policy was amended in March 2014 to exclude advanced and higher apprenticeships which had been in scope up to that point.
- The age at which learners can leave full time education changed in the summer of 2013 from 16 to 17⁴.
- August 2013 also saw the introduction of Traineeships which are short duration programmes (up to six months) aimed at 16 to 24 year olds who lack the appropriate skills and experience for work. They target some 16 to 19 year olds with a Level 3 qualification and those aged 19 to 24 yet to achieve a full Level 2.

⁴ DfE (2014) Participation of young people in education, employment or training: Statutory guidance for local authorities. September 2014. Department for Education. London.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/349300/Participation_of_Young_People_Statutory_Guidance.pdf

- Apprenticeships have continued to be an integral part of the further education vocational offer throughout the period of this study. There is a large body of evidence that tracks changes in the number of apprentices and apprenticeships already published (see for example Higton *et al*, 2014⁵; Newton *et al*, 2015; Joslin and Smith, 2014⁶) as well as a variety of official statistics such as Statistical First Releases⁷ and House of Commons statistics⁸. Given the volume of prior research and available statistics, and that apprenticeships are becoming the *de facto* route for vocational training in England, there is no separate analysis of apprentices or apprenticeships in this report. However, citations and references are made to this material where it supports the description of changes in learner numbers and associated aims over the study period.

In addition to these specific changes, a number of ideological and political changes have been made to the direction of further education policy and the way the system is funded. This includes two important publications in 2013: *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*⁹; and *The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan (Future)*. Both of these documents outlined the thinking of the coalition government about the purpose of further education. As a result of this thinking, several principles were used to guide the direction of further education:

- An important aim was to improve the quality of further education and to ensure it was fit for purpose. Over the period of the study, there has been a fall in funding in further education and a subsequent reduction in direct state funding of learning aims that are not related to areas of identified economic or social need.
- Related to the above, guidance has been issued to identify the best learning aims relating to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics because of the shortfall in skills within the UK economy in these subjects.

Whilst this study overall covers a number of other policy areas, many fall outside the timeframe of the ILR analysis. Taking one example, whilst post -6 learners without

⁵ Higton, J, Emmett, R and Halliday, R (2014) Apprenticeships Evaluation: Learners. BIS Research Paper 205. December 2014. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387662/bis-14-1208-Apprenticeships-Evaluation-Learners-December-2014.pdf

⁶ Joslin, H. and Smith, S. (2014) Progression of Apprentices to Higher Education. BIS Research Report 176. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310028/bis-14-795-progression-of-apprentices-to-higher-education-cohort-update.pdf

⁷ Skills Funding Agency (2015) Statistical First Release: Further Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held. SFA/SFR29. SFA. Coventry. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438131/SFR_commentary_June_2015.pdf

⁸ House of Commons Library, *Apprenticeship Statistics*, (February 2014).

⁹ (Insertrigour)

an English and/or Maths Level 2 qualification were encouraged to take one, such qualifications only became a condition of funding in September 2014.

Analysing the Individualised Learner Record

Annual ILRs are not small data files. The number of records held on annual ILR datasets ranged from around eight to fifteen million because of the way that data was securely passed to CFE Research for analysis. The ILR itself is a large XML relational database that is managed by a team of IT professionals. It is supplied to external analysts in the form of a flat file containing all requested variables. These records require significant professional processing time to make them ready for statistical analysis. Importantly, this means that our analysis is not completed on the original data, but from data derived from the original. The Skills Funding Agency has a number of algorithms that they use to derive population figures from the original learner data tables which it is not possible for external analysts to replicate from a flat, non-unique data file. For example, whilst the overall pattern of population in terms of growth and decline in our analysis matches trends in SFA Statistical First Releases¹⁰, our volume figures under-report slightly (consistently by around 7 per cent) compared to those of the SFA.

The structure of the ILR database has also changed within the period covered by this study. In particular, there was an important structural change in the 2011/12 academic year: the introduction of the “single ILR”¹¹. Prior to that date, records were kept on multiple databases depending on the funding stream for collections of learning aims. In 2011/12, data from all funded streams was held in the same place. From a purely technical view, the data from 2009/10 and 2010/11 is not compatible because there were inconsistent methods of collecting data between the funding streams prior to this date. Furthermore, the ILR is a working document and changes are made to variables over the years, often as a result of new or changing policy. Where required, caveats are placed on the analysis as a result of systematic differences in the structure of the data each year.

In order to provide focus to the study, a set of specific research questions were agreed with BIS. These are phrased as general hypotheses to be explored in the data. The main focus is on describing the most recent position for each hypothesis (2013/14) and then on exploring changes over time. Trend data is possible for four of the five agreed hypotheses as they are reliant on ILR data plus some merging with

¹⁰ Skills Funding Agency (2015) Statistical First Release: Further Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held. SFA/SFR29. SFA. Coventry.

¹¹ Ibid, p.22.

data from other sources. However, the review of changes in funding over time has not been possible because of missing financial data at the level of the provider. Whilst provider-level financial data is available for 2012/13 and 2013/14, the data for 2011/12 was poor and comparable financial data before this period is not available.

Hypothesis 1: The profile of further education learners has changed to reflect government policies

This is the largest section of the ILR analysis. In it we look at changes in the profile of further education learners (later analysis concentrates on the structure of learning aims). Some of the variables discussed have a one-to-one relationship with the learner such as age, sex and ethnicity. In the case of the learning aims taken by a learner, the relationship is one-to-many, which means that several learning aims can be attributed to a single learner within each year's ILR data. In this instance, the learner's highest level aim (or a randomly selected aim if more than one highest aim is at the same level) is chosen for analysis by variables related to aim such as level, subject, and duration. In the case of learners who are employed, the highest aim is nearly always the main programme aim for their training. In the case of academic learners (for example those doing A Levels), the subject aim is selected using a random seed in the data.

Learner demographics

As noted earlier, there have been significant policy changes relating to the age of the learner. These including raising the participation age (an increase in the compulsory education age in August 2013) and changes in funding rules for learners aged 24 or older from April 2013, which was further revised in March 2014.

As shown in Table 1, over half (54.4 per cent) of further education learners were aged 25 or older and over a quarter (27.2 per cent) were 18 or younger in 2013/14. The average annual percentage change¹² in the number of learners between 2009/10 and 2013/14 was -6.6 per cent. This fall was much greater for learners aged 25 or older (-8.8 per cent per annum) than for those aged 18 or younger (-3.7 per cent). Further, the fall between 2012/13 and 2013/14 for the 25 and older group was 10.4 per cent compared to just 1.9 per cent for the 18 years or younger cohort.

¹² An average of the four individual yearly changes in learner numbers within the study period

Figure 2: Changes in the number of learners by age and sex, 2009/10 to 2013/14

	Number of learners 2013/14		Average Annual change	
			since 2009/10	since 2011/12
	n	%	%	%
Age				
Under 19	1014624	27.2%	-3.7%	-2.0%
19-24	686647	18.4%	-3.1%	0.0%
25+	2030990	54.4%	-8.8%	-4.3%
Sex				
Women	1980539	53.1%	-6.9%	-2.7%
Men	1751722	46.9%	-6.3%	-3.2%
Total	3732261	100.0%	-6.6%	-3.0%

Yearly change			
2009/10 to 2010/11	2010/11 to 2011/12	2011/12 to 2012/13	2012/13 to 2013/14
%	%	%	%
2.3%	-13.0%	-2.0%	-1.9%
-2.4%	-10.1%	4.8%	-4.8%
-10.9%	-15.6%	1.7%	-10.4%
-7.3%	-14.7%	2.1%	-7.5%
-5.3%	-13.3%	0.4%	-6.9%
-6.4%	-14.0%	1.3%	-7.2%

Figure 1 also shows that there were more women than men present in the ILR for each of the years covered. Moreover, the ratio of women to men was also roughly consistent at around 53:47. Both age and sex are used as cross breaks for subsequent analysis.

A review of trends in ethnicity is complicated by two factors. The variable used to describe ethnicity changed with the introduction of the single ILR, which introduces some subtle changes in the way ethnicity is coded (including new codes such as 'Arab'). Ethnicity is also defined by the learner as opposed to constituting an absolute measure such as age or sex. As a result, it is possible that changes over time may partially be a consequence of changing cultural perceptions. For example, there was a general increase in the number of people self-classifying as being from a mixed ethnic group. In contrast, there was a fall in the number of people placing themselves into some single category ethnic groups (**Figure 2**).

Over seven in ten learners regarded themselves as 'White British' (72.2 per cent in 2013/14). The proportion doing so fell by a fraction of a percentage point from 2009/10. The proportion of learners stating their background as Any Other White increased a little over this time. The relative proportions for all other ethnicities remained stable between 2009/10 and 2013/14.

Figure 3: Changes in the profile of learners by Ethnicity, 2009/10 to 2013/14

Ethnicity	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		Average Annual change (2009/10)	Average Annual change (2011/12)
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
White British	3650783	74.0%	3380778	73.2%	2890501	72.8%	2915801	72.5%	2693732	72.2%	-7.2%	-3.4%
White Irish	30753	0.6%	28128	0.6%	23381	0.6%	20334	0.5%	18051	0.5%	-12.4%	-12.1%
White Gypsy or Irish Traveller	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2522	0.1%	3806	0.1%	4352	0.1%	n/a	32.6%
Any other White background	265199	5.4%	265179	5.7%	244609	6.2%	248894	6.2%	238773	6.4%	-2.5%	-1.2%
White and Black Caribbean	40809	0.8%	41259	0.9%	38419	1.0%	41745	1.0%	40526	1.1%	0.0%	2.9%
White and Black African	18341	0.4%	18293	0.4%	17419	0.4%	17067	0.4%	15760	0.4%	-3.7%	-4.8%
White and Asian	18268	0.4%	18244	0.4%	18092	0.5%	19338	0.5%	19139	0.5%	1.2%	2.9%
Any other mixed background	25319	0.5%	25770	0.6%	24616	0.6%	26447	0.7%	25820	0.7%	0.6%	2.5%
Indian	103108	2.1%	95142	2.1%	81397	2.0%	78779	2.0%	71088	1.9%	-8.8%	-6.5%
Pakistani	128622	2.6%	127359	2.8%	109843	2.8%	107769	2.7%	100346	2.7%	-5.9%	-4.4%
Bangladeshi	52597	1.1%	52826	1.1%	48077	1.2%	49117	1.2%	45262	1.2%	-3.6%	-2.8%
Chinese	20196	0.4%	18177	0.4%	15213	0.4%	15310	0.4%	13991	0.4%	-8.6%	-4.0%
Any other Asian background	76069	1.5%	78133	1.7%	69474	1.7%	67545	1.7%	61616	1.7%	-5.0%	-5.8%
African	160473	3.3%	160596	3.5%	141025	3.6%	140372	3.5%	127551	3.4%	-5.4%	-4.8%
Caribbean	95720	1.9%	89021	1.9%	71518	1.8%	71796	1.8%	65378	1.8%	-8.8%	-4.3%
Any other Black, African, Caribbean	33534	0.7%	32565	0.7%	33946	0.9%	34510	0.9%	29132	0.8%	-3.1%	-7.0%
Arab	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12365	0.3%	15860	0.4%	16980	0.5%	n/a	17.7%
Any other ethnic group*	95478	1.9%	87659	1.9%	61531	1.5%	58444	1.5%	52667	1.4%	-13.2%	-7.5%
Not known or Not provided	117803	2.4%	99177	2.1%	67323	1.7%	88810	2.2%	92097	2.5%	-3.1%	17.8%
Total	4933072	100.0%	4618306	100.0%	3971271	100.0%	4021744	100.0%	3732261	100.0%	-6.6%	-3.0%

*Possible change in classification resulting from the introduction of White Gypsy or Irish Traveller and Arab in 2011/12.

Profile by learning difficulty or disability

Learning difficulties and disabilities are also self-reported and are subject to changes in cultural views and medical knowledge. New conditions are recognised over time and the ability for clinicians to diagnose learning difficulties, disabilities and health problems also improves over the years. In addition, the ILR records whether the learner says they have a 'Learning Difficulty, Disability or Health Problem' (LLDD). A single variable is derived from other in-depth variables recording any such self-reported issues¹³. Bearing these caveats in mind, the data suggests that the sector has been successful in increasing enrolments from learners self-reporting a learning difficulty, disability or health problem. **Figure 3** shows that one in six learners (15.9 per cent) self-identified in this way in 2013/14 compared to one in eight (11.9 per cent) in 2009/10 and the proportion has risen steadily year on year.

Profile by socio-economic grouping

ILR records were matched to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) domain data via the learner's postcode¹⁴. In this way, it is possible to use the IMD to explore the socio-economics of learners recorded on the ILR. **Figure 4** shows how many learners were in each quintile of the IMD ranging from the most deprived to the most privileged. If learners were representative of the wider population, then it would be expected that the distribution of learners by quintile would be roughly equal (i.e. around 20 per cent per quintile).

The data in Figure 4 shows that this is not the case. Three in ten learners (29.8 per cent) were drawn from postcodes experiencing the highest levels of deprivation in England. This proportion has increased by 2.6 percentage points since 2009/10. Similarly, learners living in places experiencing the second highest levels of deprivation are over-represented in the ILR data (23.1 percent in 2013/14).

Whilst the number of learners from the most deprived areas has declined since 2009/10 (falling -2.4 per cent per annum), the decline is less than average (-6.6 per cent). Since 2011/12, the average fall has been small at less than half a per cent. It is notable that the proportion of missing values in 2009/10 and 2010/11 was much higher – the change to the Single ILR led to better coverage of the postcode field and hence an improvement in the quality of matching. There is no evidence to suggest that the quality of matching would differ depending on the indexed deprivation by postcode.

¹³ L14 and L15 in older versions of the ILR; LLDDHealthprob and L_Disability in newer versions.

¹⁴ The technical report describes this process in more detail.

Figure 4: Changes in the profile of learners by learning difficulty / disability, 2009/10 to 2013/14

	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		Average Annual change (2009/10)	Average Annual change (2011/12)
Sex	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Learner Considers Himself Or Herself To Have A Learning Difficulty, Disability, Health Problem	587972	11.9%	591292	12.8%	533985	13.4%	588117	14.6%	594911	15.9%	0.5%	5.6%
Learner Does Not Consider Himself Or Herself To Have A Learning Difficulty, Disability, Health Problem	4080709	82.7%	3785373	82.0%	3285412	82.7%	3257916	81.0%	2966647	79.5%	-7.6%	-4.9%
No Information Provided By The Learner	264391	5.4%	241641	5.2%	151874	3.8%	175711	4.4%	170703	4.6%	-8.2%	6.4%
Total	4933072	100.0%	4618306	100.0%	3971271	100.0%	4021744	100.0%	3732261	100.0%	-6.6%	-3.0%

Figure 5: Volume of learners within provider type by IMD ranking and annual percentage change since 2009/10

	2013/14 volume of learners					2013/14 distribution of learners by IMD Quintiles					Annual % change from 2009/10				
IMD Quintiles	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total
Highest deprivation	43674	150922	630060	274673	1099329	23.7%	24.6%	31.0%	32.1%	29.8%	2.6%	-4.5%	-0.9%	-0.5%	-1.3%
Second highest deprivation	33384	132603	479271	207021	852279	18.1%	21.6%	23.6%	24.2%	23.1%	1.9%	-6.2%	-2.9%	-1.5%	-3.1%
Mid ranks of deprivation	29828	107527	359392	151452	648199	16.2%	17.5%	17.7%	17.7%	17.6%	0.4%	-7.5%	-4.6%	-2.7%	-4.6%
Second least deprived	33019	98366	298645	117653	547683	17.9%	16.0%	14.7%	13.8%	14.9%	0.9%	-8.2%	-4.7%	-4.1%	-5.1%
Least deprived	44560	123629	267237	104336	539762	24.2%	20.2%	13.1%	12.2%	14.6%	0.9%	-6.5%	-6.6%	-2.9%	-5.5%
Total	184465	613047	2034605	855135	3687252	184465	613047	2034605	855135	3687252	1.4%	-6.5%	-3.4%	-2.0%	-3.6%

Variables associated with learning aims

Highest Level aim

The level of a learning aims is a key indicator of the type of provision offered in further education. In this section, we consider the highest level aim taken by an individual learner and remove all other aims associated with the learner in that year.

The highest aim of around two-thirds of learners (62.6 per cent) was at Level 2 or Level 3, whereas just under a quarter of learning aims was at a lower level aim (23.5 per cent at either Entry Level or Level 1). **Figure 5** (overleaf) also shows that one in eight learners (13.2 per cent) did not have Level defined for any qualification they were taking. This last point is important as the equivalent figure for 'no defined Level' in years prior to the single ILR was around one in five. The variation in the proportion of learners by Level each year is therefore a result of improving ILR data collection.

However, there have been significant volumetric changes since 2009/10. The number of learners whose highest qualification is at Level 2 has fallen year-on-year by 7.1 per cent since 2009/10 (5.0 per cent since 2011/12) and there were also smaller annual falls in the number of learners at Level 3 (4.3 percent and 5.1 per cent respectively). In comparison, the number of Entry level learners increased since 2009/10 and 2011/12. Whilst there was an average fall in the number of learners counting a Level 1 qualification as their highest since 2009/10, the growth profile has been quite volatile. There was a large increase in 2012/13 with numbers falling off again in 2013/14.

The number of learners at Level 4 declined sharply in 2013/14 and, whilst the number at Level 5 increased fivefold in the same year, the increase came from a low base and did not replace the Level 4 learners lost. The falls at Level 3 (-14.3 per cent) and Level 4 (-65.3 per cent) coincide with the introduction of further education loans in 2013/14.

Highest Level aim by age

Analysis of Level by age was also carried out (**Figure 6**). In 2013/14, the 25 and older age group comprise four in five (79.3 per cent) of learners whose highest qualification is at Entry Level. This age group also form the nearly two-thirds (63.8 per cent) of learners with a Level 1 aim as their highest. In both cases, the number of older learners at Entry Level and Level 1 increased each year from 2009/10 by 1.8 per cent and 1.3 per cent per annum respectively.

The 25 and over cohort also accounted for over half the learners whose highest aim was at Level 2 (55.1 per cent). Overall, this group also the largest single bloc of

learners by age and level comprising one in five (20.4 per cent) of all learners in 2013/14. However, the number of older Level 2 learners fell by -9.4 per cent per annum – more than twice the rate of decline for learners aged 18 or younger at Level 2.

Figure 6: Changes in the number of learners by Level, 2009/10 to 2013/14

	2013/14		Average % since 2009/10	Average % since 2011/12	Change 2009/10 to 2010/11	Change 2010/11 to 2011/12	Change 2011/12 to 2012/13	Change 2012/13 to 2013/14
Level	n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Entry Level	366164	9.8%	0.5%	8.2%	-17.6%	3.3%	14.6%	1.8%
Level 1	510228	13.7%	-1.5%	2.1%	-8.8%	-1.5%	14.4%	-10.2%
Level 2	1381153	37.0%	-7.1%	-5.0%	-9.4%	-8.9%	-9.3%	-0.6%
Level 3	953578	25.5%	-4.3%	-5.2%	-4.0%	-2.8%	3.9%	-14.3%
Level 4	16080	0.4%	-14.6%	-20.9%	-17.6%	1.1%	23.6%	-65.3%
Level 5	13155	0.4%	110.1%	250.5%	-38.3%	-22.2%	-14.6%	515.6%
Higher Level	426	0.0%	237.3%	503.1%	-9.6%	-47.3%	-77.2%	1083.3%
Other Level	491477	13.2%	-13.1%	-2.3%	-4.9%	-43.1%	5.0%	-9.5%
Total	3732261	100.0%	-6.6%	-3.0%	-20.0%	0.7%	1.3%	-7.2%

Figure 7: Highest Level aim by age 2013/14 and change since 2009/10

	Volume: 2013/14				Average annual percentage change 2009/10 to 2013/14			
Highest level aim	Under 19	19-24	25+	Total	Under 19	19-24	25+	Total
Entry Level	26046	49677	290441	366164	-8.1%	-1.6%	1.8%	0.2%
Level 1	96254	88514	325460	510228	-8.8%	2.0%	1.3%	-1.5%
Level 2	316879	303783	760491	1381153	-3.8%	-3.2%	-9.4%	-7.1%
Level 3	556111	199860	197607	953578	0.1%	0.7%	-13.8%	-4.3%
Level 4+	2895	7813	18953	29661	33.0%	0.9%	-13.9%	-9.7%
<i>Other / unknown level</i>	<i>16439</i>	<i>37000</i>	<i>438038</i>	<i>491477</i>	<i>-24.4%</i>	<i>-15.5%</i>	<i>-12.0%</i>	<i>-13.1%</i>
Total	1014624	686647	2030990	3732261	-3.7%	-3.1%	-8.8%	-6.6%

Older learners comprise a third (34.8 per cent) of those with a Level 3 aim as their highest. Whilst there was a slight fall in the number of learners aged 25 or older at Level 3 up to 2012/13, numbers nearly halved in 2013/14 (-43.9 per cent). The fall at Level 4 for older learners was even greater in the same period with a -81.1 per cent decline. At the same time, the number of older learners at Level 5 increased by 507.2 per cent.

There was a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of learners aged 18 or younger counting a Level 3 aim as their highest between 2009/10 (48.2 per cent) and 2013/14 (58.3 per cent). This is primarily a result of that fall in Level 3 for older learners noted above as the volume of younger Level 3 learners remained static over the period of the study. Young learners at Level 3 comprised one in seven of all learners in 2013/14.

The relative ratio of women to men by age group remained roughly the same in each of the five years of the study. For the 25 years and older age group, women outnumber men by a ratio of around 58:42. This position is reversed for learners aged 18 or younger (47:53) and for those aged 19 to 24 (48:52).

Highest Level by socio-economic grouping

Figure 7 shows that learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds were much more likely to have a low level aim as their highest in 2013/14. Over two in five (42.7 per cent) of entry level learners lived in the most deprived 20 per cent of postcodes in England and a further quarter (26.6 per cent) lived in the second quintile of most deprived wards. The same distribution was found for Level 1 learners. It is also the case that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds on low level aims had the greatest numerical growth from 2009/10 onwards.

At Level 2, the story was similar but less pronounced. Three in ten learners (30.7 per cent) with their highest aim at Level 2 were from the most deprived postcodes and 23.8 per cent lived in the second most deprived tier.

For higher levels, the distribution of learners by postcode Index of Multiple Deprivation score was more representative of the overall population in England.

However, there is an important caveat as the volume of learners with unclassified / "other" level aims fell over the same time period. As many former learners on the Adult Safeguarded Learner dataset had no level associated with their aim, the changes in 'other' could simply be a result of improved data coverage on the ILR. The introduction of the Single ILR in 2011/12 removed inconsistencies in the data collection methods. Since then, the total number of learners with highest aims at Entry Level and Level 1 has grown even more: by 10.2 per cent per year at Entry

Level and by 4.1 per cent at Level 1. Growth was more pronounced amongst disadvantaged groups, especially at Level 1.

Figure 8: Changes in the level of learners' highest aim by IMD ranking, 2009/10 to 2013/14

	Totals 2013/14		2013/14 postcode by IMD quintile					Annual % Change since 2009/10 by IMD quintile					
Level	n	%	Most deprived			Least deprived		Most deprived			Least deprived		Total
Entry Level	360553	9.8%	42.7%	26.6%	14.7%	9.2%	6.8%	3.2%	2.7%	1.1%	-0.6%	-2.3%	2.0%
Level 1	499132	13.5%	39.4%	25.1%	15.6%	11.4%	8.6%	6.0%	3.1%	-1.0%	-3.3%	-7.9%	1.4%
Level 2	1362233	36.9%	30.7%	23.8%	17.8%	14.5%	13.1%	-2.3%	-4.6%	-6.5%	-7.0%	-7.8%	-5.1%
Level 3	946868	25.7%	22.8%	21.2%	18.8%	17.6%	19.5%	-2.8%	-3.7%	-4.3%	-4.3%	-3.8%	-3.8%
Level 4+	29324	0.8%	18.5%	21.0%	20.8%	19.4%	20.4%	-6.8%	-8.5%	-9.8%	-10.3%	-10.2%	-9.2%
Other Level	489142	13.3%	22.1%	20.3%	18.6%	18.0%	20.9%	-12.7%	-11.7%	-9.8%	-8.5%	-6.7%	-10.1%
Total	3687252		29.8%	23.1%	17.6%	14.9%	14.6%	-2.4%	-4.2%	-5.6%	-6.1%	-6.4%	-4.6%

There is a shorter term decline (since 2011/12) in highest aims at Levels 2 and 3 amongst the most deprived. At Level 2, the annual fall in the volume of highest aims amongst the most disadvantaged was -3.2 per cent, compared to -2.3 per cent since 2009/10. At Level 3, the short term fall is even steeper at -5.1 per cent per annum.

Further, the general falls in the number of learners whose highest aim was at Levels 3 and 4 have already been noted. These falls were greater the more deprived was the home postcode of the learner. For Level 3, the fall in the number of learners from the most deprived postcodes was -16.1 percent compared to a fall of -9.8 per cent for learners in the least deprived postcodes. At Level 4, the percentages were -69.7 per cent and -60.5 per cent respectively.

Analysis by provider type

Using data provided by BIS, organisations delivering SFA-funded training were classified into four groups: *schools*, *FE colleges*, *private providers* and *others* (including public sector organisations and charities in direct receipt of SFA funds). The technical report includes a full explanation of the way in which individual provider types were classified into these four groups.

Figure 8 shows that over half of funded learners were in *FE colleges* in 2013/14 and just under a quarter were at *private providers*. Although funded learners in *schools* account for just one in twenty learners, this is the only group that experienced annual growth since 2009/10. Conversely, one in six learners was at provision in the *other* classification. However, numbers here fell nearly ten percent per year since 2009/10.

Figure 9: Volume and change in funded provision by provider

	2013/14		
Type of provider	n	%	Annual % Change since 2009
School	185136	5.0%	0.6%
FE College	2067949	55.4%	-4.0%
Private	863374	23.1%	-6.2%
Other	615802	16.5%	-9.6%
Total	3732261	100.0%	-5.6%

The fall in learner volumes seen between 2012/13 and 2013/14 affected *schools* less than other providers. Whilst the number of learners in *schools* decreased by -2.0 percent in 2013/14, this fall was smaller than those experienced by *FE colleges* (-8.1 per cent), *private providers* (-5.3 per cent) and *other* providers (-8.0 per cent).

Analysis of profile by provider type

Sub-group trend analysis by provider types reveals some interesting changes in the profile of funded learners.

- Whilst the median age of learners within the *schools* category has unsurprisingly remained the same between 2009/10 and 2013/14 (17 years of age), the median age of learners in *FE colleges* and *private providers* has fallen. In the case of *FE colleges*, the median age fell from 27 years old in 2009/10 to 24 years in 2013/14. The median ages for *private Providers* were 28 to 26 respectively. The median age of learners in *other* types of provision remained steady at 40 years of age.
- The balance between men and women by provider mostly remained similar except for *private providers*. In 2009/10, 52 per cent of learners at *private providers* were men. By 2013/14 there were more women (50.5 percent) than men. This is principally because the decline in volume for men at *private providers* was greater than that of women (falls of -7.4 per cent and -4.9 per cent per annum respectively). Equal numbers of men and women were enrolled at *FE colleges* whereas more women than men were at *schools* (56.2 per cent women) and *other* providers (66.4 per cent).

Figure 9 (overleaf) shows the distribution of learners by provider type based on the IMD classification of their home postcode. This reveals some distinct trend data.

- Providers classed as *schools* catered for both ends of the IMD spectrum. Nearly a quarter of learners at *schools* lived in areas with the highest deprivation (23.7 per cent) with a similar proportion (24.2 per cent) living in the least deprived postcodes in the country. The *schools* category is heterogeneous including numerous sub-classifications of schools such as state schools, academies, independent schools, sixth forms and pupil referral units.
- In contrast, *FE colleges* and *private providers* had a learner profile that was skewed towards the more deprived postcodes of England. Nearly a third of learners in both types of institution lived in the *most* deprived quintile of postcodes in England whereas only one in eight learners came from the *least* deprived postcodes.
- The growth profile of learners differs by provider type. Although accounting for a small proportion of overall learners, the only increase in volume since 2009/10 was in *schools* learners which increased by 1.4 per cent per annum. Interestingly, there were larger increases in volumes in learners from the most deprived postcodes (2.6 per cent per annum) and from the second most deprived (1.9 per cent).
- Conversely, learner volumes have decreased markedly (-6.5 per cent per annum) amongst providers in the *other* category, these mostly comprising government and charitable organisations offering their own training.
- In the case of *FE colleges*, learner volumes have on average decreased annually by -3.4 per cent. These falls are not evenly spread by the home postcode of the learner. Enrolments from the most deprived postcodes fell by -0.9 per cent per annum compared to a -6.6 per cent per annum fall from enrolments in the least deprived postcodes.

Figure 10: Volume of learners within provider type by IMD ranking and annual percentage change since 2009/10

	2013/14 volume of learners					2013/14 distribution of learners by IMD Quintiles					Annual % change from 2009/10				
IMD Quintiles	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total
Highest deprivation	43674	150922	630060	274673	1099329	23.7%	24.6%	31.0%	32.1%	29.8%	2.6%	-4.5%	-0.9%	-0.5%	-1.3%
Second highest deprivation	33384	132603	479271	207021	852279	18.1%	21.6%	23.6%	24.2%	23.1%	1.9%	-6.2%	-2.9%	-1.5%	-3.1%
Mid ranks of deprivation	29828	107527	359392	151452	648199	16.2%	17.5%	17.7%	17.7%	17.6%	0.4%	-7.5%	-4.6%	-2.7%	-4.6%
Second least deprived	33019	98366	298645	117653	547683	17.9%	16.0%	14.7%	13.8%	14.9%	0.9%	-8.2%	-4.7%	-4.1%	-5.1%
Least deprived	44560	123629	267237	104336	539762	24.2%	20.2%	13.1%	12.2%	14.6%	0.9%	-6.5%	-6.6%	-2.9%	-5.5%
Total	184465	613047	2034605	855135	3687252	184465	613047	2034605	855135	3687252	1.4%	-6.5%	-3.4%	-2.0%	-3.6%

Hypothesis 1: The profile of further education learners has changed to reflect government policies – summary

This first hypothesis was the broadest, exploring whether changes in the student profile between the 2009/10 and 2013/14 academic years reflected policy priorities.

It is undoubted that learner numbers and the number of learning aims they took declined over this period. The trend data in the ILR extracts show numbers of learners fell by -6.6 per cent per annum over the analysis period.

Moreover, there was a marked fall at the time that the most influential policies for this element of the study were enacted: In August 2013, the compulsory participation age for education was increased from 16 to 17 years of age; and in April 2013, loans for learners aged 25 or over on Level 3 or Level 4 programmes were introduced. This latter policy was amended to exclude apprenticeships in March 2014. Several changes in the data coincide with the introduction of these policies.

Volumetric changes related to Advance Learning Loans

Looking first at the potential¹⁵ impact of Advanced Learning Loans, overall learner volumes in the years that loans were introduced, between 2012/13 and 2013/14, fell by -7.7 per cent. Further, the fall in the number of learners aged 25 or older was steeper at -10.4 per cent. It is important to consider these top-level changes in the overall context of FE reform. Like most areas of government spending, funding for further education reduced in the analysis period and the targets for funding changed to concentrate on areas that were classed as important priorities.

There is evidence that targeting across the years of the study met with some success. For example, the fall in the volume of learners from the fifth most deprived postcodes in England fell at a lower rate (-1.3 per cent per annum) than those from the fifth least deprived (-5.5 per cent per annum). Overall, further education learners are over-represented in the population as over half of learners live in the 40 per cent most deprived wards in the country. Further Education Colleges and Private Providers are particularly good at recruiting such learners.

The sector has been successful in growing the number of learners whose highest aim is at Entry of Level 1, especially amongst learners from the most deprived

¹⁵ The word potential is important. This study was not designed to look at causation, but relationships. Looking at the evidence presented in the report as a whole, it seems likely that policies did have some impact on the changes described in the report. However there is no exploration of the weight attributed to policy in changing learner volumes.

postcodes in England. For example, 42.7 per cent of learners whose highest aim is Entry Level live in the fifth most deprived wards, as do 39.4 per cent of learners with a Level 1 aim as their highest. This is a clear strength of the sector, especially as the total number of learners with a highest aim at Entry Level or Level 1 has grown over the analysis period (by 2.0 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively).

However, the picture at higher Levels is less positive. The BIS strategy document notes that “higher skill levels translate directly into higher labour productivity and enable countries to adopt new technologies.”¹⁶ Over a third of further education learners have a Level 2 aim as their highest. However, there was an annual fall of 5.1 per cent in the number of these learners. More positively, the fall in learner numbers in the most deprived wards was less than the average (-2.3 per cent per annum) which is especially important given the relationship between Level 2 qualifications and increases in incomes for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bibby et al, 2014¹⁷). There were also falls at Levels 3 and 4 (-3.8 per cent and -9.2 per cent per annum respectively) and, at these levels, the proportion of learners living in the most deprived wards was broadly representative of the overall population. In relation to advanced learning loans, the fall in number of higher Level learners when the loans were introduced is notable. The number of learners at Level 3 fell by: -14.3 per cent and those at level 4 by -65.3 per cent between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Responses to raising of the participation age

Trend analysis also shows some interesting variations in the number of 16 to 18 year olds in the sector. Whilst there was an overall fall of -1.9 per cent in the number of learners aged 18 or younger between 2012/13 and 2013/14, the fall was mostly due to fewer learners with an Entry Level or Level 1 aim as their highest. At the same time, the number of learners at Levels 2 and 3 increased by 2.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent respectively.

The change in learner numbers by type of provider also shows some interesting trends. The only provider type to grow numbers across the analysis period was schools (0.6 per cent per annum). Although the overall number fell in schools by -2.0 per cent between 2012/13 and 2013/14, this was a less-marked fall than the sector as a whole (-7.2 per cent). Looking solely at the under 19 age group, the average

¹⁶ DfE and BIS (2013). Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills. April 2013. London.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/186830/13-960-rigour-and-responsiveness-in-skills-amended.pdf

¹⁷ Bibby, D., Buscha, F., Cerqua, A., Thomson, D. and Urwin, P. (2014), Estimation of the labour market returns to qualifications gained in English Further Education, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research Paper No. 195.

annual growth in providers classed as *schools* was 3.0 per cent compared to a -2.5 per cent fall overall. In 2013/14 (when the first stage of RPA came into effect), the number of learners aged 18 or under in schools rose by 1.7 per cent compared to a 1.9 per cent fall elsewhere. In particular, the number of younger people at private and 'other' providers fell markedly in 2013/14 (-6.6 per cent and -11.1 per cent respectively). This shows that schools were more successful in recruiting young learners after the compulsory participation age increase to 17.

Hypothesis 2: Providers are working with more employers from target groups

Analysis was undertaken looking at learners who had a programme aim with an employer (referred to as 'employed learners' in this section). Data matching was used to match employed learners to the Blue Sheep Employer Data Set (EDS), which records details of the employer organisation, using an identification number. This match was not always successful, especially in the case of ILR data from 2009/10 and, to a lesser extent, 2010/11. For example, nearly three-quarters of apprentices and two-thirds of advanced apprentices did not have a valid employer ID in 2009/10. Whilst this position had been rectified by 2010/11, there were still a number of aims on legacy programmes such as Entry for Employment and Pathway programmes without valid employer ID entries in this year.

For this reason, a shorter time series analysis has been completed for employer engagement which uses more consistent ILR data from 2011/12 onwards. However, there are still some issues with data quality over this shorter period. The quality of the match between the ILR and the EDS data improves over time¹⁸. The proportion of individual learners with an unmatched employer ID in 2011/12 was 35.9 per cent. This decreased to 17.9 per cent by 2012/13 and was almost zero by 2013/14. This means that the profile of significant numbers of *employers* in the years before 2013/14 is unknown, which precludes any volumetric analysis of employers by business demographics.

As a result, we have reviewed changes in the *proportions* of learners and aims associated with employer IDs year-on-year which assumes no bias in the distribution of unmatched Employer IDs across the three years of the study. This assumption is untested.

¹⁸ Blue Sheep maintain a historical dataset of all employers which is maintained and updated over time. Their matching processes have developed. For example, they now clean data using both trading name and legal name (they used to only use the former). Employers stay in the dataset even if they no longer have learners.

Employed learners by size and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) of their employer

Figure 10 shows the number of employed learners in organisation where both the sector and size are known. In 2013/14, over one in five (22.0 per cent) employed learners were with organisations classed in the *Human Health and Social Work Activities* Section of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). Nearly three in ten employed learners were found in three other SIC Sections: *Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles* (12.8 per cent); *Manufacturing* (8.5 per cent); and *Construction* (7.2 per cent) .

Figure 11: Number and proportion of employed learners* working in SMEs, 2013/14 and change since 2011/12

SIC Section	All (n)	Proportion All (%)	SMEs (n)	Proportion SME (%)	% employment exc. Self-employed in SMEs in England (ONS)	Change in representation by SIC Section since 2011/12
Q Human Health and Social Work Activities	196294	22.0%	152789	77.8%	53.7%	0.5%
G Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles	114183	12.8%	65870	57.7%	37.0%	0.1%
F Construction	64313	7.2%	53230	82.8%	42.4%	-0.2%
C Manufacturing	75580	8.5%	50095	66.3%	50.1%	-0.1%
I Accommodation and Food Service Activities	61316	6.9%	40886	66.7%	52.9%	0.7%
P Education	81046	9.1%	37839	46.7%	36.7%	-0.8%
S Other Service Activities	44688	5.0%	37286	83.4%	52.0%	0.1%
N Administrative and Support Service Activities	40706	4.6%	26816	65.9%	35.1%	-1.1%
R Arts Entertainment and Recreation	27277	3.1%	23071	84.6%	30.9%	0.0%
M Professional Scientific and Technical Activities	30283	3.4%	21540	71.1%	48.5%	0.6%
H Transportation and Storage	35329	4.0%	21412	60.6%	25.9%	-0.5%
J Information and Communication	16143	1.8%	12550	77.7%	38.1%	0.3%
K Financial and Insurance Activities	18342	2.1%	9067	49.4%	22.5%	0.2%
L Real Estate Activities	9749	1.1%	6510	66.8%	55.5%	0.2%
A Agriculture Forestry and Fishing	5426	0.6%	4971	91.6%	66.6%	0.1%
E Water Supply Sewerage Waste Management and Remediation Activities	5156	0.6%	2915	56.5%	21.6%**	-0.1%
O Public Administration and Defence Compulsory Social Security	62995	7.1%	1093		n/a	-0.1%
T Activities of Households As Employers etc.	618	0.1%	571	92.4%	n/a	0.0%
D Electricity Gas Steam and Air Conditioning Supply	1707	0.2%	541	31.7%	21.6%**	0.0%
U Activities of Extraterritorial Organisations and Bodies	491	0.1%	393	80.0%	n/a	0.0%
B Mining and Quarrying	570	0.1%	350	61.4%	21.6%**	0.0%
Total	892212	100.0%	569795	63.9%	41.9%	

*Base includes only those employed learners for whom size and sector of employer was listed.

** Sections B, D and E are combined together in the ONS business statistics.

This distribution of *learners* broadly tallies with the distribution of *employers* by SIC found in research on apprenticeships such as the 2014 Evaluation of Apprenticeship Employers (Colahan and Johnson, 2014¹⁹) with the exception of *Accommodation and Food Service Activities*. The difference in the target audience for each study is likely to explain variations in sector.

Almost two-thirds (63.9 per cent) of employed learners were based within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). As a point of comparison, the proportion of employees in the whole English economy working in SMEs was 41.9 per cent at the start of 2014²⁰. Furthermore, there are some marked differences in the proportion of employed learners based in SMEs compared to the general distribution of employment by sector. For example, learners employed by *Construction* firms are twice as likely to be employed by an SME compared to the general employment profile of the English economy. Differences of a similar magnitude are found for employers in the SIC Sections of *Arts Entertainment and Recreation*, *Transportation and Storage*, and *Information and Communication*.

The final column in Figure 10 shows the average change in the distribution of employed learners by SIC section since 2011/12. The largest increases in the proportion of employed learners are shown for employers in the SIC Sections of *Accommodation and Food Service Activities*, *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities*, *Human Health and Social Work Activities* and *Information and Communication*. Conversely, there was a fall in representation for employers within the *Administrative and Support Service Activities*, *Education* and *Transportation and Storage* SIC Sections.

Employed learners by level of highest aim and employer's SIC

The highest aim of over half of employer learners (56.1 per cent) was at Level 2 and the highest aim of a further third (36.2 per cent) was at Level 3. **Figure 11** ranks SIC Sections by the proportion of employed learners whose highest aim is at Level 2. This ranged from *Accommodation and Food Service Activities* with nearly three-quarters (72.2 per cent) of employed learners at Level 2 down to *Mining and*

¹⁹ Colahan, M. and Johnson, C. (2014) Apprenticeships evaluation: employers. *BIS Research Paper* 204. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387595/bis-14-1207-Apprenticeships-Evaluation-Employers-December-2014.pdf

²⁰ BIS (2014) *Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions 2014*. Table 20 England. Published 26 November 2014.

Quarrying with 42.6 per cent (although only 570 employed learners were based in organisations in this SIC Section in 2013/14).

The SIC Sections with the highest proportions of Level 3 employed learners were *Information and Communication* (47.6 per cent), *Mining and Quarrying* (46.1 per cent) and *Financial and Insurance Activities* (44.5 per cent). Also noteworthy are *Human Health and Social Work Activities*, *Manufacturing* and *Construction* because of the high volume of employed learners at Level 3 working for organisations classed as such. Two in five (41.9 per cent) of all employed learners at Level 3 worked for organisations within these 3 SIC Sections. Further, over a third (35.6 per cent) of employed learners at Level 4 or higher were found in this Section. The *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities* Section is also worth highlighting because of the high levels of employed learners whose highest level was at Level 3 (40.7 per cent) and Level 4 (7.8 per cent).

Short-term growth figures from 2011/12 are also shown. Since that time, there has been a decline in the number of employed learners with a highest aim at Level 2 of 4.1 per cent per annum and an annual increase at Level 3 of 6.7 per cent.

Looking at SIC sections with larger volumes of employed learners (10,000 or more), the largest increases at Level 2 have been seen within the following SIC Sections:

- *Accommodation and Food Service Activities* (+14.5 per cent per annum);
- *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities* (+14.1 per cent);
- *Information and Communication* (+9.7 per cent); and
- *Financial and Insurance Services* (+8.0 per cent).

The biggest fallers over the same period at Level 2 were in:

- *Administrative and Support Service Activities* (down -18.0 per cent per annum);
- *Transportation and Storage* (down -14.7 per cent);
- *Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles* (-13.1 per cent); and
- *Manufacturing* (-9.2 per cent).

At Level 3, there were increases in the number of employed learners across nearly all SIC Sections with the notable exception of Education. The largest annual rises in Sections with most learners were in:

- *Real Estate Activities* (+ 27.3 per cent per annum);

- *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities* (+ 23.2 per cent);
- *Financial and Insurance Services* (+19.3 per cent);
- *Accommodation and Food Service Activities* (+19.0 per cent);
- *Information and Communication* (+18.9 per cent);
- *Transportation and Storage* (+17.1 per cent); and
- *Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles* (+13.3 percent).

Although the increases at sub-Level 2 and Level 4+ appear large, they are from relatively low bases in 2011/12 (27,809 and 7,605 learners respectively). The doubling of employed learners in two years at Level 4+, and the annual increases at Level 3 is positive given the policy focus on higher level learning.

Figure 12: Number and proportion of employed learners by highest level aim, 2013/14 and change since 2011/12

SIC Section	2013/14					Average % Change since 2011/12				
	Entry / L1 / Other	L2	L3	L4+	Total	Entry / L1 / Other	L2	L3	L4+	Total
I Accommodation and Food Service Activities	4.8%	72.2%	22.5%	0.5%	61316	115.2%	14.5%	19.0%	68.4%	17.3%
H Transportation and Storage	7.7%	72.0%	19.4%	0.9%	35329	168.8%	-14.7%	17.1%	92.9%	-6.8%
N Administrative and Support Service Activities	8.0%	69.1%	21.6%	1.3%	40706	28.3%	-18.0%	2.8%	52.1%	-12.1%
E Water Supply Sewerage Waste Management & Remediation	4.1%	66.5%	28.3%	1.1%	5156	105.7%	-15.4%	2.9%	73.3%	-9.6%
A Agriculture Forestry and Fishing	7.6%	64.8%	26.2%	1.4%	5426	224.6%	17.0%	21.0%	135.7%	21.6%
G Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles	5.1%	60.9%	33.1%	1.0%	114183	116.9%	-13.1%	13.3%	55.7%	-4.5%
F Construction	3.8%	59.7%	35.7%	0.8%	64313	76.2%	-2.9%	1.6%	-23.4%	-0.4%
O Public Administration and Defence Compulsory Social Security	4.8%	58.2%	34.9%	2.0%	62995	23.1%	-3.0%	2.2%	42.5%	-0.1%
S Other Service Activities	3.5%	58.0%	37.7%	0.8%	44688	80.2%	0.6%	11.6%	20.3%	5.4%
T Activities of Households As Employers etc.	5.8%	57.6%	34.6%	1.9%	618	509.4%	40.3%	31.7%	n/a	38.0%
R Arts Entertainment and Recreation	4.0%	56.6%	38.8%	0.6%	27277	227.4%	1.8%	5.7%	37.9%	5.0%
D Electricity Gas Steam and Air Conditioning Supply	5.4%	54.2%	39.3%	1.1%	1707	178.0%	34.5%	-21.1%	69.1%	1.9%
L Real Estate Activities	5.0%	53.7%	39.7%	1.7%	9749	149.2%	15.1%	27.3%	23.1%	21.7%
C Manufacturing	9.0%	52.5%	37.2%	1.4%	75580	70.1%	-9.2%	12.1%	43.2%	1.4%
U Activities of Extraterritorial Organisations and Bodies	4.7%	50.7%	41.8%	2.9%	491	-8.5%	-11.1%	28.3%	238.6%	-14.4%
K Financial and Insurance Activities	3.6%	49.7%	44.5%	2.2%	18342	71.8%	8.0%	19.3%	40.8%	14.3%
Q Human Health and Social Work Activities	4.8%	49.3%	42.9%	3.1%	196294	19.3%	1.9%	2.5%	125.7%	3.8%
J Information and Communication	3.9%	45.5%	47.6%	3.1%	16143	225.5%	9.7%	18.9%	149.4%	17.1%
M Professional Scientific and Technical Activities	6.0%	45.5%	40.7%	7.8%	30283	95.1%	14.1%	23.2%	39.9%	21.3%
P Education	11.4%	44.3%	42.4%	1.9%	81046	8.4%	-6.4%	-1.6%	34.4%	-2.8%
B Mining and Quarrying	9.6%	42.6%	46.1%	1.6%	570	278.2%	-31.9%	2.2%	-69.3%	-19.7%
UNCLASSIFIED	3.5%	58.5%	33.8%	4.2%	142	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	5.9%	56.1%	36.2%	1.9%	892354	39.4%	-4.1%	6.7%	52.6%	1.5%

Employed learners by provider type and SIC

In 2013/14, the majority of employed learners were training with either *private providers* (51.7 per cent) or *FE colleges* (40.5 per cent). As might be expected, **Figure 12** also shows that very few employed learners trained in *schools* (0.3 per cent) and one in thirteen (7.4 per cent) were training with *other providers*.

Since 2011/12, the share of employed learners training with *private providers* fell by 2.1 per cent whereas the share at *FE colleges* increased by 1.7 per cent. Furthermore, the number of employed learners training at *FE colleges* increased by 3.8 per cent per annum and fell slightly by 0.3 per cent amongst *private providers*.

Private providers had the largest 'market share' in nine of the fourteen SIC Sections with over 10,000 employed learners in each section. Employed learners were two and a half more times more likely to train with *private providers* compared to *FE colleges* if their employer was within the *Accommodation and Food Service Activities* (70.2 per cent *private*, versus 28.4 per cent at *FE colleges*) and *Financial and Insurance Activities Sectors*, and twice as likely for employers in the *Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles* SIC Section. *Private providers* also train more employed learners in the largest SIC Section by volume, *Human Health and Social Work Activities* (57.0 per cent against 39.8 per cent in *FE Colleges*).

Where *FE colleges* have a greater market share, they tend to be less dominant within a sector than *private providers*. For example, the largest share of a populous sector held by *FE colleges* was the 56.9 per cent of learners employed in the *Manufacturing* SIC Section, compared to 40.2 per cent with *private providers*. FE Colleges also trained 56.3 per cent of employed learners in the *Construction* sector in 2013/14 compared to the 32.3 per cent trained by *private providers* and the 11.3 per cent trained by *other providers*. The *other* group also trained most employed learners (58.5 per cent) in the *Public Administration and Defence Compulsory Social Security* SIC Section, which includes the large number of those learning in the armed forces.

Although *private providers* have the target market share, they have seen a slight decline in volume since 2011/12. This is primarily due to falls in volume in some of the SIC Sections with a lot of employed learners such as *Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles* (a fall of -11.5 per cent per annum), *Education* (-4.8 per cent) and *Construction* (-11.3 per cent). In comparison, FE Colleges enjoyed an increase in numbers in each of these SIC Sections over the same period. Both types of provider enjoyed above-average growth in learner volumes for those employed in the *Human Health and Social Work Activities*, *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities*, *Financial and Insurance Activities* and *Information and Communication* SIC Sections.

Figure 13: Distribution of highest Level aims by subject tier, 2013/14 and change since 2011/12

SIC Section	Share of employed learners 20013/14					Average percentage change per annum since 2011/12				
	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total	School	Other	FE College	Private	Total
Q Human Health and Social Work Activities	0.5%	2.7%	39.8%	57.0%	196294	-20.5%	-14.9%	5.0%	4.7%	3.9%
G Wholesale and Retail Trade Repair of Motor Vehicles & Motorcycles	0.1%	1.8%	33.4%	64.7%	114183	31.3%	30.3%	13.7%	-11.5%	-4.5%
P Education	0.8%	5.2%	41.5%	52.5%	81046	-4.1%	-4.8%	0.5%	-4.8%	-2.8%
C Manufacturing	0.1%	2.7%	56.9%	40.2%	75580	76.7%	0.1%	1.3%	2.0%	1.6%
F Construction	0.1%	11.3%	56.3%	32.3%	64313	-15.8%	8.0%	6.5%	-11.3%	-0.3%
O Public Administration and Defence Compulsory Social Security	0.1%	58.5%	21.5%	20.0%	62995	-20.2%	8.7%	-12.5%	-5.1%	0.0%
I Accommodation and Food Service Activities	0.3%	1.0%	28.4%	70.2%	61316	-10.8%	1.6%	25.1%	15.2%	17.4%
S Other Service Activities	0.3%	1.6%	37.8%	60.3%	44688	6.7%	6.0%	14.2%	1.0%	5.5%
N Administrative and Support Service Activities	0.3%	2.8%	49.6%	47.3%	40706	9.3%	1.2%	-15.0%	-8.9%	-11.9%
H Transportation and Storage	0.3%	1.2%	51.4%	47.1%	35329	111.4%	2.0%	-6.0%	-7.8%	-6.8%
M Professional Scientific and Technical Activities	0.4%	1.9%	42.6%	55.1%	30283	63.1%	22.4%	25.2%	18.5%	21.3%
R Arts Entertainment and Recreation	0.4%	2.8%	42.0%	54.9%	27277	2.8%	56.6%	5.2%	3.8%	5.2%
K Financial and Insurance Activities	0.3%	1.3%	28.2%	70.2%	18342	22.2%	24.8%	15.4%	14.3%	14.6%
J Information and Communication	0.3%	21.1%	27.6%	51.0%	16143	45.8%	-4.5%	12.0%	36.8%	17.1%
L Real Estate Activities	0.2%	2.0%	40.4%	57.5%	9749	104.2%	12.6%	7.3%	37.5%	21.9%
A Agriculture Forestry and Fishing	0.0%	3.9%	67.6%	28.5%	5426	-49.1%	1.2%	27.3%	14.8%	21.9%
E Water Supply Sewerage Waste Management and Remediation	0.3%	3.7%	59.0%	36.9%	5156	112.5%	0.8%	-7.8%	-13.2%	-9.5%
D Electricity Gas Steam and Air Conditioning Supply	0.0%	0.1%	38.0%	62.0%	1707	n/a	25.0%	9.8%	-2.1%	1.9%
T Activities of Households As Employers etc.	0.0%	5.5%	40.3%	54.2%	618	-50.0%	73.6%	47.0%	32.3%	38.0%
B Mining and Quarrying	0.0%	12.1%	65.1%	22.8%	570	n/a	48.7%	-12.1%	-37.6%	-18.6%
U Activities of Extraterritorial Organisations and Bodies	0.0%	4.5%	40.9%	54.6%	491	n/a	56.3%	15.1%	-24.1%	-14.4%
UNCLASSIFIED	0.7%	4.2%	64.8%	30.3%	142	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	0.3%	7.4%	40.5%	51.7%	892354	-6.0%	4.5%	3.8%	-0.3%	1.6%

Hypothesis 2: Providers are working with more employers from target groups – summary

The Holt Review of 2012²¹ explored ways in which apprenticeships could be more accessible to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Holt particularly highlights the importance of flexible and responsive training to SMEs. The overall tone of policy is to improve access to vocational training for SMEs.

The data shows that there are more further education learners working in SMEs than would be expected given the overall employment profile of adults in England. Nearly two-thirds (63.9 per cent) of employed learners worked for SMEs in 2013/14 and this compares to 41.9 per cent of the whole workforce in England at the same time. SME representation of employed learners was particularly high in the *Construction* (82.8 per cent) and *Human Health and Social Work Activities* (77.8 per cent) SIC Sections.

The highest aim of nearly all employed learners was either Level 2 (56.1 per cent) or Level 3 (36.2 per cent). There were distinct variations depending on the industrial sector in which the learner was employed. Many services sectors had a higher than average proportion of learners at Level 2 (such as *Accommodation and Food Services* and *Retail*) whereas technical and secondary industry sectors tended to have more learners than average at Level 3 (e.g. *Manufacturing* and *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities*). The key exception to this general rule was learners employed in the *Human Health and Social Work Activities* SIC section.

Policy is also directed towards improving the technical skills base at Level 3. The number of employed learners *for whom an employer can be identified* since 2011/12²² has increased by an average of 1.5 per cent in both years. However, there has also been an improvement in the quality of the data over this time which may account for any change²³. As a result there are question marks concerning the ability of the data to adequately explain changes in learner volumes. If it is assumed the error resulting from unmatched records is unbiased, then there was a relative increase in the number of employed learners at Level 3 at the expense of those at Level 2. Moreover, increases in Level 3 in some technical sectors such as *Information and Communication* and *Professional Scientific and Technical Activities*

²¹ Holt, J. (2012) Making Apprenticeships More Accessible to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. BIS, London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34731/12-891-making-apprenticeships-more-accessible-to-smes-holt-review.pdf

²² Data before this time is less reliable.

²³ The proportion of individual learners with an unmatched employer ID in 2011/12 was 35.9 per cent. This decreased to 17.9 per cent by 2012/13 and was almost zero by 2013/14.

were relatively large. However, the data is inconclusive. Further analysis on publication of the 2014/15 final ILR will help clarify this position.

Hypothesis 3: Reductions in funding have affected the quality of further education provision

The idea of quality is relatively subjective and is hard to classify in management information data. The markers of educational quality are variable and dependent on a range of factors including the skills of teachers and trainers and the relevance of training to the learner (and employer). In 2011, BIS considered a range of outcome-based metrics for 'success' in adult further education using experimental data in the 2010/11 academic year (BIS, 2014²⁴). Whilst useful, success measures such as learner destinations, progression and earning do not necessarily equate to training quality.

Several other metrics are arguably more useful as quality measures. For example, the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England (SASE) sets out some quality metrics such as the number of guided learning hours (GLH) and a minimum duration of one year. Whilst GLH is the better quality measure, its coverage in the ILR is patchy and so it is not useful for time series analysis. However, duration can be assessed for the vast majority of aims and is used in this analysis. Duration is not without its problems as a proxy: an aim may be undertaken over a long period of time but involve little guided learning. Furthermore, some training such as Traineeships is designed to be short duration and lead onto an apprenticeship. However, there is some evidence that relates duration to quality measures in other studies. For example, Higton *et al* (2014, p.96)²⁵ identified a weak but significant correlation between apprenticeship length and hours spent training at an external provider away from the usual workplace (which is another quality measure used in the SASE standards).

This section therefore looks at changes in the proportion of aims that are achieved over the period of the study and the duration of aims as proxies for quality. The ILR breaks outcomes into several categories (**Figure 13**) which were reclassified for the purpose of analysis. When discussing the duration of aims, only those re-classed as

²⁴ BIS (2014) Outcome based success measures: Experimental Data 2010/11. August 2014. BIS London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/342727/bis-14-1004-adult-further-education-outcome-based-success-measures-experimental-data-v15.pdf. The authors note the elapsed time between the experimental data and the publication date.

²⁵ Higton, J., Emmett, R. and Halliday, R. (2014) Apprenticeships Evaluation: Learners. BIS Research Paper 205. December 2014. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387662/bis-14-1208-Apprenticeships-Evaluation-Learners-December-2014.pdf

Achieved [*Achieved (non-AS level aims)* and *Achieved and cashed (AS levels only)*] were used.

Figure 14: Analysis class of ILR outcomes

ILR code in outcome / A35	Class for analysis
1 = Achieved (non AS-level aims)	Achieved
2 = Partial Achievement	Other
3 = No Achievement	Not achieved
4 = Exam Taken/ Assessment Completed But Result Not Yet Known	Other
5 = Learning Activities Are Complete But The Exam Has Not Yet Been Taken And There Is An Intention To Take The Exam/Assessment	Other
6 = Achieved but uncashed (AS-levels only)*	Other
7 = Achieved and cashed (AS-levels only)*	Achieved
9 = Study Continuing	Continuing

* From 2010/11 onwards

Achieved aims

In 2013/14, three in five (59.6 per cent) aims were *achieved* and one in five (19.6 per cent) were *continuing* (**Figure 14**). The *volume* of aims listed as *achieved* increased by 7.8 per cent per annum from 2009/10. However, the *proportion* of all aims listed as *achieved* decreased by a percentage point per annum over the same time period. Part of the reason for these changes is structural as there was a large increase in the number of aims classed as *continuing* over this period (up 17.3 per cent per annum), as well as year-on-year growth in the proportion of *continuing* aims (up 1.1 per cent per annum). One explanation for this change is an increase in the number and proportion of aims lasting longer than a year.

Achieved aims by age

Figure 14 shows some variation in the achieved rate of aims by age. Learners aged 18 or younger were more likely to have achieved their aims than those aged 19 to 24 (59.2 per cent versus 50.4 per cent). However, the 19 to 24 age group were more likely to be continuing with their aims (27.3 per cent compared 10 to 16.5 per cent). The over 25 age group were more likely than others to achieve (64.2 per cent). Looking at achieved and continuing aims combined, the proportion increased with age: three quarters (75.7 per cent) of aims taken by under 19s ended in achievement or continuation rising to over four in five (82.1 per cent) of the 25 and older group.

Figure 15: Achieved aims by age in 2013/14 and change since 2009/10

	2013/14					Average percentage change since 2009 in	
Age	Achieved	Continuing	% Achieved	% Continuing	% Achieved or continuing	Number of aims achieved	Proportion of aims achieved
Under 19	2543751	708438	59.2%	16.5%	75.7%	2.4%	-0.1%
19-24	1631613	884135	50.4%	27.3%	77.6%	14.8%	-0.9%
25+	4456747	1238569	64.2%	17.9%	82.1%	9.7%	-1.5%
Total	8632111	2831142	59.6%	19.6%	79.2%	7.8%	-0.9%

Achieved aims by provider type

There is a large amount of structural variation between achieved and continuing aims by provider type. In the case of *schools*, nearly four in five aims (78.0 per cent) were *achieved* in 2013/14 and just 2.9 per cent were classed as *continuing*. At the other end of the spectrum, fewer than half (46.0 per cent) of the aims taken by learners at *private providers* were *achieved* and three in ten (30.9 per cent) were classed as *continuing*.

Looking at *achieved* and *continuing* aims *combined*, there was much less variation by provider type. Learners at *other* providers were the most likely to record a known positive outcome with 84.9 per cent *achieving* or *continuing*. *Schools* and *FE colleges* had similar proportions (80.9 per cent and 79.3 per cent respectively) with *private providers* having the lowest combination figure (76.8 per cent).

FE colleges and *schools* saw annual increases in the proportion of aims that were either *achieved* or *continuing* since 2009/10: the increases were 0.8 and 0.7 percentage points per annum respectively. Conversely, the figure for *other* providers fell very slightly (-0.1 percentage point per annum) whereas the combined figure for *achieved* and *continuing* aims fell by half a percentage point per annum at *private providers*.

With respect to quality, much of this variation will be a result of the different types of learning delivered by providers. However, the fall in positive outcomes amongst *private providers* may suggest such providers were facing some problems with delivery. Conversely, the annual increases for *FE colleges* and *schools* suggest that they have been successful in managing change over the period covered in the study.

Duration of achieved aims

Duration by Level

Duration was derived by subtracting the start date from the actual completion date listed in the ILR. The result was the number of days it took to complete an aim. Looking at all completed aims, the median duration per aim decreased from 162 days in 2009/10 to 140 days by 2013/14 (**Figure 15**). However, this change masks some important structural changes in the ILR. In 2009/10, just over a quarter of achieved aims (26.3 per cent) were at Entry Level or Level 1. This proportion increased to over a third (35.3 per cent) by 2013/14. Lower Level aims tended to be of shorter duration than those at higher Levels, and have become shorter over the study period. In the case of Level 1 aims, the median duration nearly halved from 132 days 2009/10 to 70 days in 2013/14.

The picture is different for achieved aims at higher Levels. At Level 2, the median duration fell between 2009/10 and 2011/12 and then increased again up to 2013/14 (during which time the volume of Level 2 aims increased markedly). On average, the duration of Level 2 aims increased by 6 days a year between 2009/10 and 2013/14. In comparison, the median duration at Level 3 barely moved.

Figure 16: Median duration of learning aims by Level, 2013/14

	2013/14			
	Median	Annual change (days)	Total	Annual change (%)
Entry Level	72	-11.5	1100268	19.6%
Level 1	70	-15.5	1946311	17.3%
Level 2	234	6.0	2342116	6.9%
Level 3	298	0.5	1285390	3.0%
Level 4	366	21.0	15315	-6.6%
Level 5	274	-14.9	108	-36.7%
Higher Level	0	n/a	0	-51.6%
Other	56	0.0	1942603	6.2%
Total	140	-5.5	8632111	9.0%

Duration by provider type

As the mix of aims by Level differs by provider, the typical duration of achieved aims also differs (**Figure 16**). Looking at aims at Level 2 and above, there are distinct differences by provider. For *schools*, the median duration changed little by Level which ties in with the formalised academic year for providers of this type. By comparison, the general pattern of increasing duration with Level is apparent at *FE colleges*. For *private* and *other* providers, the changes are different. Whilst Level 2

aims are the shortest, Level 3 aims have a longer median duration than the small number of completed aims at Level 4 or above. Looking at all aims at Level 2 or higher, those delivered by *private providers* had the longest duration and those at *other* providers the shortest.

Figure 17: Median duration of learning aims by Level and type of provider, 2013/14

Broad Organisation type category	Level 2				Level 3			
	Median	Change in median (days)	N	Annual change (%)	Median	Change in median (days)	N	Annual change (%)
School	277.00	0.5	58982	-4.9%	299.00	-0.8	428720	2.1%
Other	134.00	-8.5	174959	7.1%	362.00	20.5	33629	1.2%
FE College	203.00	-7.5	1276469	5.1%	291.00	0.0	598109	0.7%
Private	289.00	26.5	820379	12.2%	391.00	15.3	224780	18.7%
Total*	235.00	6.0	2330789	7.0%	298.00	0.5	1285238	3.0%

Broad Organisation type category	Level 4				Total			
	Median	Change in median (days)	N	Annual change (%)	Median	Change in median (days)	N	Annual change (%)
School	308.00	15.8	203	-9.3%	298.00	-0.5	487905	1.0%
Other	277.00	34.5	1472	5.3%	172.00	-8.3	210060	5.7%
FE College	365.00	19.5	8701	-13.9%	270.00	0.0	1883279	3.4%
Private	377.00	13.8	5047	21.9%	329.00	29.8	1050206	13.3%
Total*	366.00	19.8	15423	-8.2%	286.00	3.3	3631450	5.3%

Overall, the duration of aims has increased at Levels 2 and 4+. In particular, there were large increases in the duration in aims at all Levels at *private providers*: the median at Level 2 increased by 26.5 days annually since 2009/10, by 15.3 days at Level 3, and by 13.8 days at Level 4 and above.

Over the same period, the duration of Level 2 aims fell by around 8 days per annum at *FE colleges* and *other* providers. At Level 3, there was no change in the duration of achieved aims at *FE Colleges*. However, the length of Level 3 aims at *other* providers increased by 20.5 days per annum. Aims at Level 4 and above increased across the board.

Hypothesis 3: Reductions in funding have affected the quality of further education provision – summary

In many senses, this question is qualitative in nature. Quantitative measures of quality tend to lose the nuance of any activity and may under-represent some important gains made by a target audience. For example, school performance tables include a variety of value-added metrics in order to measure the relative

impact on disadvantaged pupils. The work cited earlier by Bibby *et al* (2014²⁶) also challenges some long-held assumptions about the value of lower level qualifications to the disadvantaged and adds to the ‘quality’ debate.

Changes in the proportion of learners achieving or continuing learning aims

Two proxies for quality were examined in the ILR for this study. The first is changes in the proportion of qualifications that were achieved or continuing. Ideally, this should either increase over time to show improvements in outcomes or, in the case of smaller budgets, remain at a similar level to illustrate that providers are coping with financial change. Of course, the measure has flaws. For example, one reason why the proportion of aims achieved increases could be that the aim itself is easier – a line of argument followed by some critics of the historical increases in the proportion of learners achieving high grade A Levels.

ILR data shows a structural change in the balance between achieved and continuing aims. In the period analysed, the proportion of aims achieved decreased by a percentage point per annum whereas the proportion of aims classed as continuing increased by around the same amount. In combination, this shows the sector responded well to falls in the amount of funding received.

Using the proportion of aims achieved or continuing as a proxy for a response to changes in funding, *Schools* and *FE colleges* reacted better than other providers. Both showed an annual increase in the combined rate of 0.8 and 0.7 per cent respectively. Conversely, *private providers* struggled on this measure showing a fall of -0.5 per cent over the same period.

Changes in the duration of aims

The second proxy is the duration of the aim. Duration is a usual proxy as it generally correlates to the depth of content within an aim. Whilst it is true that a short duration, full-time aim may have more guided learning hours than a longer duration, part-time aim, duration does provide a useful rule of thumb for the amount of content. In the case of apprenticeship, for example, a minimum duration is stipulated in the current SASE standards and past apprenticeship research shows a relationship between

²⁶ Bibby, D., Buscha, F., Cerqua, A., Thomson, D. and Urwin, P. (2014), *Estimation of the labour market returns to qualifications gained in English Further Education*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research Paper No. 195.

duration and the amount of time spent training away from a usual workplace (Higton *et al*, 2014, p.96)²⁷.

Although the overall median duration of aims decreased from 162 days in 2009/10 to 140 days in 2013/14, the main reason for this change was the structure of all aims taken by learners. A third (35.3 per cent) of all aims was at Entry Level of Level 1 in 2013/14 which was an increase of nine percentage points compared to 2009/10.

At Level 2, aim duration has risen markedly since 2011/12 and the median increased by 6 days per annum between 2009/10 and 2013/14. The story at Level 3 is different. There has been no overall change in median duration over the period of analysis. However, there have been improvements by provider type, especially amongst private providers at which the median duration of training has increased by 27 days per annum at Level 2 and 15 days per annum at Level 3. Coupled with the decrease in the number of aims and learners in private provision, these changes may suggest that shorter duration training has substantially reduced. Some of this provision has been used in the past for the purpose of staff retention and reward as opposed to improving the skills of employees (see for example Hogarth *et al*, 2012²⁸). As policy seeks to target training on those that need to improve skills or gain new ones, so it is possible that changes to the funding model have reduced instances of employers using training as a reward mechanism or for accrediting an employee's existing skills or knowledge.

Hypothesis 4: Further education is concentrating more on STEM aims

It is a long held view that the UK economy suffers as a result of shortages in workforce STEM skills. Past research tends to concentrate on STEM shortages at Level 4 and higher and much of the literature looks at the supply and demand of skills at undergraduate and postgraduate level (see for example Bosworth, Lyonette and Wilson, 2013²⁹). As a result, the definition of STEM is based on academic subjects in medicine, sciences, mathematics, computer programming and

²⁷ Higton, J., Emmett, R. and Halliday, R. (2014) Apprenticeships Evaluation: Learners. *BIS Research Paper 205*. December 2014. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387662/bis-14-1208-Apprenticeships-Evaluation-Learners-December-2014.pdf

²⁸ Hogarth, T. et al (2012) Employer Investment in Apprenticeships and Workplace Learning: The Fifth Net benefits of Training to Employers Study. *BIS Research Paper 67*. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32306/12-814-employer-investment-in-apprenticeships-fifth-net-benefits-study.pdf

²⁹ Bosworth, D., Lyonette, C. and Wilson, R. (2013). The Supply of and Demand for High-Level STEM Skills. Evidence Report 77. November 2013. UKCES. Wath-upon-Deane. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/302973/evidence-report-77-high-level-stem-skills_1.pdf

engineering. In 2012, a 157 Group report (Green and Fletcher, 2012³⁰) explored challenges in provision with the further education sector. Their definition of STEM was broader and encompassed some lower level qualifications such as numeracy, functional skills, and information and communication technology.

In this study, a narrower definition has been taken based on the Tier 2 Subject Group. **Figure 17** shows which Tier 2 subject lines were classed as STEM in this instance. The 'mixed' group are subjects within the ILR that had no Tier 2 classification and could potentially have been STEM. The proportion and number of aims without a Tier 2 code decreases with time, suggesting that the quality of data increased. As a result, these have been generally removed from analysis.

Figure 18: LARS Tier 2 Subjects classed as STEM

STEM	LARS Code	Subject Tier
Yes	1.1	Medicine and Dentistry
Yes	2	Science and Mathematics
Yes	2.1	Science
Yes	2.2	Mathematics and Statistics
Yes	3.3	Animal Care and Veterinary Science
Yes	4.1	Engineering
Yes	4.2	Manufacturing Technologies
Yes	5.1	Architecture
Yes	6	Information and Communication Technology
Yes	6.1	ICT Practitioners
Yes	6.2	ICT for Users
Mixed	1	Health, Public Services and Care
Mixed	3	Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
Mixed	4	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Mixed	5	Construction, Planning and the Built Environment

The main contention within the selected aims below is *6.2 ICT for Users*. This falls outside of the prior higher education definitions although would fall inside the subjects used before by the 157 Group. Its inclusion is subjective and significant as, if included, aims in this subject accounted for 29.5 percent of all STEM aims in 2013/14. The tables in this section show both figures. However, commentary excludes *6.2 ICT for Users*.

³⁰ Green, K. and Fletcher, M. (2012). The challenges of Stem provision for further education colleges. 157 Group. October 2012. London. <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-challenges-of-stem-fe.pdf>

The other issue to consider is the sections of the economy for which STEM is perceived as an issue. The shortage within the net supply of qualifications tends towards the higher level (Level 3 plus). However, in the case of further education, there is an argument for also considering supply issues i.e. the extent to which those with lower level qualifications can progress into Level 3 and higher. For that reason, Level 2 has also been considered within this analysis. All aims at Entry Level, Level 1 and 'Other' Level have been excluded.

By definition, the approach by Level tends to exclude any supplementary aims that form part of multi-qualification training programmes such as apprenticeships. However, to aim for consistency, the analysis also looks only at a programme's main aim at Level 2 or above where this is applicable.

Changes in volume in STEM subjects at Level 2 and higher

Figure 18 shows that STEM aims accounted for around one in six (17.1 per cent) aims at Level 2 or higher in 2013/14. This was a higher proportion compared to 2009/10 when one in seven aims (13.6 per cent) at Level 2+ were STEM. Looking at the distribution by Level, the majority of STEM aims are at Level 3 or higher (60.5 per cent). In comparison, Level 3+ aims account for 41.1 per cent in the FE sector as a whole. Only two STEM Tiers had more than 50 aims recorded at Level 4+ in 2013/14: *06.1 ICT for Practitioners* had around twice as many aims at Level 4+ as did *04.1 Engineering*.

The volume of STEM aims has increased annually since 2009/10 by 1.2 per cent per annum. Growth has been focussed more at Level 2 (+3.6 per cent per annum) whereas the number of L3 aims remained roughly static (a slight annual decline of 0.1 per cent). Whilst growth at Level 4+ looks dramatic at 66.9 per cent per annum, it is from a low base and the volume relative to Levels 2 and 3 was small.

It is notable that STEM aims were less affected by the overall falls experienced at Levels 3 and 4 in 2013/14. Whilst Level 3 STEM aims fell by -3.7 per cent, this was far less severe than the fall in all Level three aims at -13.0 per cent in that year. Furthermore, the volume of STEM aims at Level 4 or higher increased by 57.9 percent from a low base and this compares very favourably in the overall fall of -35.4 per cent at Level 4 or higher across the sector in 2013/14.

By volume, the largest two STEM Subject Tiers were *02.1 Science* (26.1 per cent of all STEM aims) and *04.1 Engineering* (25.0 per cent). Aims classed under *02.2 Mathematics and Statistics* (19.9 per cent) and *06.1 ICT for Practitioners* (16.4 per cent) comprised most of the rest. Except for *02.2 Mathematics and Statistics*, each of the subject groups had a higher proportion of aims at Level 3. However, the main growth was seen at Level 2 especially for *06.1 ICT for Practitioners* (17.0 per cent per annum) and *02.2 Mathematics and Statistics* (11.5 per cent pa).

Figure 19: STEM aims at Level 2 or higher 2013/14 and growth in these aims since 2009/10

	2013/14										
Tier 2 Description	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+	Total L2+	Distribution by T2 (%)	% L3+		Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+	Total
01.1 Medicine and Dentistry	20	1286	0	1306	0.2%	98.5%		n/a	-10.0%	n/a	-9.3%
0.2 Science and Mathematics	0	0	0	0	0.0%	n/a		-34.6%	-39.5%	n/a	-39.6%
02.1 Science	25327	178725	0	204052	26.1%	87.6%		3.0%	0.6%	n/a	0.8%
02.2 Mathematics and Statistics	88863	67107	0	155970	19.9%	43.0%		11.5%	2.0%	n/a	6.5%
03.3 Animal Care and Veterinary Science	16767	25038	46	41851	5.3%	59.9%		4.0%	8.3%	450.1%	6.4%
04.1 Engineering	89528	105451	1005	195984	25.0%	54.3%		0.1%	-4.5%	40.4%	-2.9%
04.2 Manufacturing Technologies	44745	11177	22	55944	7.1%	20.0%		6.1%	3.2%	44.2%	3.7%
05.1 Architecture	0	11	0	11	0.0%	100.0%		n/a	52.3%	n/a	52.3%
06 Information and Communication Technology	20	1	0	21	0.0%	4.8%		-42.9%	-31.5%	n/a	-42.1%
06.1 ICT Practitioners	44215	81960	1985	128160	16.4%	65.5%		17.0%	3.6%	153.3%	7.6%
Total STEM	309485	470756	3058	783299	100.0%	60.5%		3.6%	-0.1%	66.9%	1.2%
06.2 ICT for Users	68300	8632	0	76932	8.9%	11.2%		-11.4%	-5.0%	n/a	-11.9%
Total including ICT for Users	377785	479388	3058	860231	100.0%	56.1%		-0.6%	-0.2%	66.9%	-0.6%
All L2+	2697055	1842850	42355	4582260		41.1%		-3.9%	-2.4%	0.1%	-3.9%
<i>STEM as a proportion of all (%)</i>	<i>11.5%</i>	<i>25.5%</i>	<i>7.3%</i>	<i>17.1%</i>							
<i>STEM as a proportion of all inc. ICT for Users (%)</i>	<i>14.0%</i>	<i>26.0%</i>	<i>7.3%</i>	<i>18.8%</i>							

Comparative duration of STEM aims at Level 2 and higher

In the main, the duration of achieved STEM aims is longer than other aims and, in some cases at higher Levels, the difference is large (see **Figure 19** and **Figure 20**). Looking first at Level 2 aims, the differences tend to be relatively modest. The median duration of all achieved STEM aims is 266 days compared to 224 for others. The difference is greater at *FE colleges* (84 days, or around two and a half months) and *other providers* (81 days). There is less difference in the duration of achieved Level 2 STEM aims at *schools* and *private providers*.

At Level 3, there is no overall difference between the median duration in STEM and non-STEM aims. However, there is one major exception by provider type: STEM aims at *private providers* have a much longer median duration than non-STEM aims – STEM aims are 283 days longer. This is because Level 3 Engineering aims form a high proportion of those delivered by *private providers* and these are typically longer duration (see Highton *et al*, 2013³¹, p.6 for a comparative view of the length of engineering apprenticeships compared to others).

In the case of Level 4 and above, achieved STEM aims are over a year (379 days) longer in duration than non-STEM, albeit from a low base of 385 total aims. Nearly all of these aims were delivered by FE Colleges (median duration of 651 days) or Private Providers (median duration 960 days). As noted earlier, most of these aims were in *04.1 Engineering* or *06.1 ICT for Practitioners*.

³¹ Highton, J., Tu, T., Emmett, R. and Colahan, M. (2013) Apprenticeship Evaluation: Learners. *BIS Research Paper 124*. BIS. London. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229998/bis-13-1126-apprenticeship-evaluation-learners.pdf

Figure 20: Median duration in achieved aims by Level and Provider, 2013/14, and average annual change in median from 2009/10

Narrower flag for STEM subjects based on Tier 2 class	Broad Organisation type category	Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Total	
		Median	Change in median (days)	Median	Change in median (days)	Median	Change in median (days)	Median	Change in median (days)
STEM	School	283.00	0.0	299.00	-1.0	.00	0.0	298.00	-1.0
	Other	207.00	-11.3	375.00	3.5	317.50	-95.6	242.00	-6.0
	FE College	266.00	-1.0	291.00	0.0	651.00	161.8	284.00	-0.8
	Private	309.00	8.8	663.00	21.0	960.00	193.1	387.00	10.5
	Total	266.00	-1.0	298.00	0.0	745.00	185.3	291.00	-0.5
Not STEM	School	273.00	0.8	298.00	-1.0	308.00	15.8	297.00	-0.5
	Other	126.00	-8.3	351.00	19.0	277.00	34.5	158.00	-8.0
	FE College	182.00	-9.5	291.00	0.0	365.00	19.5	263.00	-0.8
	Private	288.00	26.8	380.00	17.3	375.00	13.3	322.00	30.0
	Total	224.00	6.0	298.00	1.0	366.00	19.8	282.00	4.0
Total	School	277.00	0.5	299.00	-0.8	308.00	15.8	298.00	-0.5
	Other	134.00	-8.5	362.00	20.5	277.00	34.5	172.00	-8.3
	FE College	203.00	-7.5	291.00	0.0	365.00	19.5	270.00	0.0
	Private	289.00	26.5	391.00	15.3	377.00	13.8	329.00	29.8
	Total*	235.00	6.0	298.00	0.5	366.00	19.8	286.00	3.3

Figure 21: Number of achieved aims by Level and Provider, 2013/14, and average annual percentage change from 2009/10

Narrower flag for STEM subjects based on Tier 2 class	Broad Organisation type category	Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Total	
		N	Annual change (%)	N	Annual change (%)	N	Annual change (%)	N	Annual change (%)
STEM	School	16521	-0.4%	141265	4.8%	0	n/a	157786	4.2%
	Other	18149	19.5%	11044	27.9%	12	n/a	29205	22.1%
	FE College	152354	8.7%	132230	3.0%	123	-10.2%	284707	5.9%
	Private	42013	16.4%	35658	10.5%	250	171.6%	77921	13.1%
	Total	229037	9.6%	320197	4.7%	385	18.6%	549619	6.5%
Not STEM	School	42461	-6.1%	287455	0.9%	203	-9.3%	330119	-0.3%
	Other	156810	6.2%	22585	-4.5%	1460	5.3%	180855	4.1%
	FE College	1124092	5.0%	465738	0.4%	8552	-13.9%	1598382	3.3%
	Private	778212	12.0%	189122	20.6%	4797	21.1%	972131	13.4%
	Total	2101575	6.9%	964900	2.7%	15012	-8.4%	3081487	5.4%
Total	School	58982	-4.9%	428720	2.1%	203	-9.3%	487905	1.0%
	Other	174959	7.1%	33629	1.2%	1472	5.3%	210060	5.7%
	FE College	1276469	5.1%	598109	0.7%	8701	-13.9%	1883279	3.4%
	Private	820379	12.2%	224780	18.7%	5047	21.9%	1050206	13.3%
	Total*	2330789	7.0%	1285238	3.0%	15423	-8.2%	3631450	5.3%

Hypothesis 4: Further education is concentrating more on STEM aims – summary

Although a shortage of learners in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) has historically been of concern in higher education, there is a policy interest in further education too. This analysis looks at the data from Level 2 and above for specific aims listed in the LARA database. As well as directly addressing shortages at Level 3 and above, further education also provides a supply of learners who can progress onto more complex study through gaining a Level 2 qualification.

Using a narrow selection of LARA subjects, 17.1 per cent of further education aims at Level 2 or higher were classed as STEM in 2013/4. This represents a three percentage point increase from the position in 2009/10. Growth in learner numbers has been focussed at Level 2 (up 3.6 per cent per annum), with the position at Level 3 remaining static.

Notably, STEM aims were less affected by the overall falls at Level 2 and 3 in 2013/14. Whilst the number of STEM aims at Level 3 fell by -3.7 per cent in this year, the fall is much less than overall (-13.0 per cent). From a low base, Level 4 STEM aims increased by 57.9 per cent compared to an overall fall in the sector of 35.4 per cent in that year. The four main STEM subject tiers were *02.1 Science* (26.1 per cent of all STEM aims), *04.1 Engineering* (25.0 per cent), *02.2 Mathematics and Statistics* (19.9 per cent) and *06.1 ICT for Practitioners* (16.4 per cent).

The data suggests that the sector is concentrating more on STEM.

4. Overall views on the FE Reform programme

Key points

This chapter sets out research findings on providers' views on general aspects of the FE Reform programme:

- In depth interviews, providers were asked how they viewed the FE Reform programme as a whole:
 - Many saw it as an umbrella term for varied and wide-ranging changes which, in many respects, were distinctive.
 - Other providers had a more 'holistic' view of the programme as one targeted at a number of key aims – such as increased employer engagement, rationalising the qualifications system, or improving overall FE quality.
 - Generally, providers were supportive of the general aims of the programme (though, as subsequent chapters will show, not necessarily supportive of individual aspects or consequences of changes).
- In survey, providers very frequently reported that they had changed their operations in a wide range of ways – these changes being generally more frequent in FE colleges than for private training providers. The most frequent changes were in critical areas of delivery – in overall business strategy, in the types of provision offered, and in quality improvement.
- In survey, too, providers revealed that a key change leading to development of their 'offer' was essentially that of much greater market responsiveness – to demand from employers and individuals. Labour market information was a frequently-used guide to planning of provision; and partnership working, with LEPs and other organisations, was an important way of seeking to position provision as responsive to local economic needs.
- In line with ILR analysis reported in the previous chapter, providers' survey responses indicate shifts in the learner profile as a consequence of reform with: (1) the proportion of FE learners aged 16 to 18 advancing and the proportion of learners aged 24 or above retreating; and (2) increases in the proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Looking to the future, providers were asked about the possible impacts of further budget changes. The main change identified in survey was that many more providers expected to narrow the range of course they offered than expected the range to widen. In qualitative interviews, anticipated changes involved providers increasing their apprenticeship, Traineeship, and Trailblazer offers to respond to perceived government emphasis in these areas and to diversify their funding sources to replace funding lost from central government.

Introduction

Following chapters will report provider perceptions of the value and impact of particular aspects of the Reform programme. However, the research also asked providers, in both the qualitative and quantitative interviews, for some perceptions of the Reform programme as a whole. Answers to these more general questions are reported in this chapter.

Understanding of the FE Reform Programme

All providers interviewed in-depth were asked how they would describe the FE Reform programme. A consistent view that emerged was that they perceived the FE Reform programme to be an umbrella programme for a variety of different initiatives and reforms:

‘There are a series of reforms which are non-distinct and broad-ranging, as opposed to set in tablets of stone, which are known as the Reform programme. There are all sorts of changes happening, obviously, both in terms of the way in which colleges are funded, but also in terms of what their core purpose is, how they deliver qualifications, how they prepare young people and adults for the world of work and for HE and so on.’ (General FE College)

‘It is quite hard to see the FE Reform programme without talking about specific bits of it. It’s quite difficult to see the whole of the FE reform programme in a box.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

‘I don’t think we see the Reform programme as a sort of, cohesive, integrated thing. It’s a series of initiatives, I think, from the way we look at it.’ (General FE College)

As such, different providers found that different elements of the programme had significantly more or less impact on their organisation, depending on their main areas of delivery. Simplification and the introduction of the National Careers Service were believed to have had the least impact on providers. Many providers reported that they did not think simplification had necessarily happened as they still faced a perceived reporting burden, whilst most had had little or no contact with the National Careers Service.

On the other hand, changes to apprenticeships, the introduction of loans, and changes to the qualifications that can be funded were seen to have had a large impact on most providers as these were perceived to have altered the way in which they can engage with learners and the pattern of whom they engage with.

‘Particular qualifications have come out of the framework. As a result, there is huge concentration on getting people into work, which doesn’t recognise that there’s a huge group of people who do need to get into work but aren’t on JSA or on ESA, Employment Support Allowance. So the reforms, I think, have been quite

a blunt tool in some respects, to tackle what are quite complex issues sometimes.'
(*'Other' Provider*)

In addition, the changes to English and maths GCSE requirements were also seen as key to providers, many of whom felt this was off-putting to potential learners, with some preferring a 'key skills' approach to English and maths.

Other providers were more able to see the FE Reform programme as a holistic programme with a range of tangible aims. Specifically, many perceived the increased engagement and power of employers as a central aim of the programme which most were in favour of. This is particularly true of private providers who noted they had a long history of directly engaging with employers. However, general FE colleges also emphasised that they were keen to work with employers to further build on existing relationships and to extend work with employers that they were already undertaking:

'Well, for me reform is about, a bit more recently about actually giving the power, rightfully giving the responsibility back to the employer.' (General FE College)

Other key aims of the FE Reform programme noted by providers included ensuring FE providers have more freedom to go out and implement change with a mandate to do this, ensuring the simplification and rationalisation of the qualifications system and improving overall quality.

Whilst views on the appropriateness of particular reforms were mixed (as explored in following chapters), most providers believed that the aims of the programme were appropriate. They supported reforms that would increase perceptions of vocational qualifications as being of a similar level of quality and value as other types of qualifications.

A few providers (mostly those designated as 'other' types of providers such as local authorities and charities) do not believe the changes in the FE Reform programme are highly relevant to them due to the nature of the learners they work with, especially if they are not offering Apprenticeships.

Some private providers also commented on the lack of direct support or communication when they are implementing changes and cited a reliance on BIS and SFA documentation to help understand and interpret the reforms. This had made implementation more challenging for them:

'You're very much reliant on just documentation, rather than actually having a relationship manager or a partnership manager to support you.' (Private Provider)

Changes made as a result of the FE Reform programme

In survey, FE providers were asked which, from a list of possible changes, their organisation had made as a result of the FE Reform programme (see **Figure 21**).

More than nine in ten providers overall (94%) mentioned at least one change that they had made. Eight in ten (80%) had changed their business planning and strategy, whilst more than seven in ten had each made changes to the types of provision offered (76%) and to practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning (72%). More than six in ten had also implemented changes to the way they identified business opportunities (65%), changed their organisation structure (64%), or introduced new approaches to partnership working (60%).

There were some differences in the types of changes providers had implemented by provider type. FE colleges (88%) and 'other' providers (87%) were significantly more likely to have introduced changes to the types of provision offered than were private providers (67%). These two types of provider were also more likely to have made changes to their organisation structure (76% each compared with 56% of private providers). FE colleges were also more likely to have changed their business planning and strategy (88%) than other types of provider.

Larger organisations were more likely to have implemented *any* changes than smaller ones, with 11% of smaller providers (1,000 learners or less) having undertaken no changes.

Figure 22: Changes made by providers as a result of the FE Reform programme

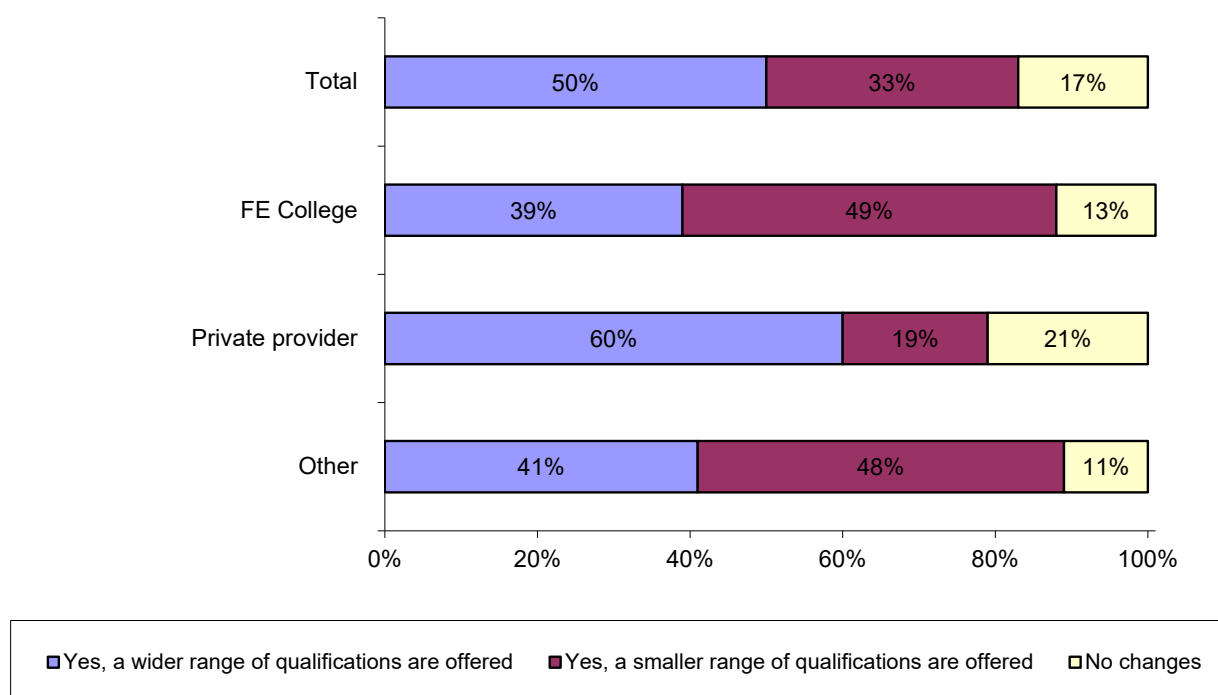
	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Changed business planning and strategy	80%	88%	76%	81%
Introduced changes to the types of provision offered	76%	88%	67%	87%
Implemented practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning	72%	70%	72%	77%
Changed the ways in which business opportunities are identified	65%	76%	59%	71%
Made changes to organisation structure	64%	76%	56%	76%
Introduced new approaches to partnership working	60%	72%	53%	66%
Made changes to governance and management structures	57%	60%	51%	69%
Changed the way with which you work with employers	54%	60%	51%	54%
Introduced greater accountability to the local community	43%	60%	32%	58%
Targeted the recruitment of learners from different backgrounds than previously	39%	38%	37%	45%
Increased subcontracting arrangements	22%	24%	19%	27%
Another way	2%	5%	1%	3%
None of the above	6%	3%	9%	0%

Q1B, all respondents, bases shown in table

Those providers which had introduced changes to the types of provision offered, were asked whether the range of qualifications offered by their organisation had changed (see **Figure 22**). Half (50%) said they now offered a wider range of qualifications and 33% a smaller range.

Private providers (60%) were more likely than either FE colleges (39%) or 'other' providers (41%) to now offer a wider range of qualifications.

Figure 23: Changes in the range of qualifications offered



Q1C, where introduced changes to the types of provision offered, base=247

A mixed picture was also reflected in the qualitative research, with some providers stating that as a result of qualifications rationalisation they had fewer courses to choose from for which they could receive funding. However, many private providers noted that they now offered more qualifications than they had previously so they could diversify and increase their learner numbers:

'We've stopped doing things that, obviously, were no longer funded, so were clearly not considered to be of key importance anymore.' (General FE College)

'We're developing apprenticeships outside of our core market, because they'll be more stable.' (Private Provider)

In the quantitative survey, FE providers were asked, on an unprompted basis, how they sought to develop the provision offered in their local area. They were asked for all methods used and the main method (see **Figure 23**).

The most popular methods *overall* were working with other partners (57%) and responding to demand from employers (56%), each mentioned by more than half of providers. Sizeable proportions also mentioned using local labour market information (45%) and responding to demand from learners (30%). In terms of the *main* method, these remained the top four methods. [A similar experience was noted in in-depth interviews. When asked how they made decisions relating to the types of qualifications

they offered, the vast majority of providers noted that they tried to work with partners and local employers to best respond to the needs of their local community.]

FE colleges (72%) and 'other' providers (75%) were more likely to mention working with other partners (compared with 46% of private providers), and to respond to demand from learners (38% and 40% respectively compared with 24% of private providers). FE colleges were also more likely to mention using local labour market information (61% compared with 47% of 'other' providers and 38% of private providers).

Figure 24: How providers seek to develop what provision is offered in the local area (all methods and main method used)

	Total		FE College		Private provider		Other	
	Any	Main	Any	Main	Any	Main	Any	Main
Sample bases	329	329	65	65	205	205	59	59
Working with other partners (e.g. LEPs and employers)	57%	22%	72%	27%	46%	18%	75%	31%
Responding to demand from employers	56%	26%	73%	26%	50%	30%	49%	14%
Using local labour market information	45%	11%	61%	18%	38%	8%	47%	11%
Responding to demand from learners	30%	10%	38%	9%	24%	8%	40%	17%
Building on what has been done previously	9%	4%	10%	4%	9%	5%	8%	2%
Marketing/advertising	5%	1%	0%	0%	8%	1%	3%	0%
Working with Job Centre/Job Centre Plus inc DWP	4%	1%	0%	0%	4%	2%	6%	0%
Work with local authority/council	4%	1%	1%	0%	6%	1%	3%	0%
Networking	3%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Work with the community inc groups & organisations	3%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	11%	0%
Work with schools/colleges/universities	3%	1%	1%	0%	3%	1%	4%	0%
Stakeholders	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Road/trade/skills shows/fair/workshops	1%	*%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Apprenticeships	1%	*%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other	14%	14%	8%	0%	17%	19%	15%	20%
Don't know	1%	8%	0%	15%	2%	6%	0%	5%

Q2A/B, all respondents, bases shown in table, *% indicates less than 0.5%

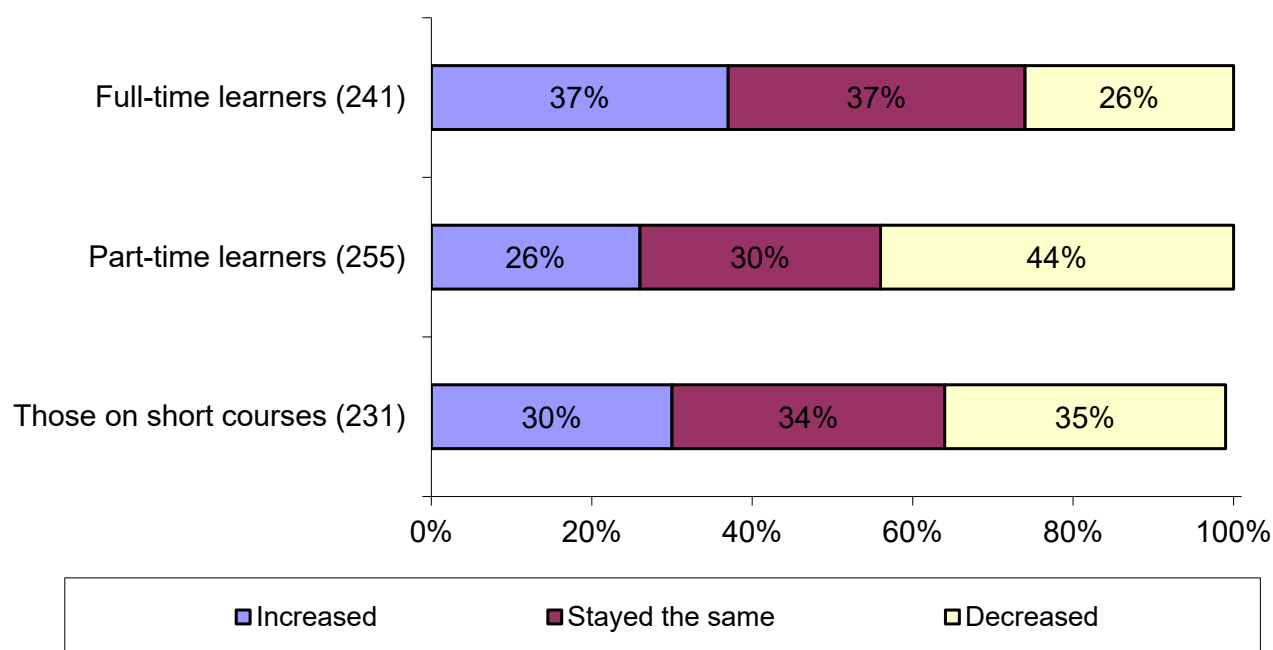
In-depth interviews identified that in some cases – as a result of working with a range of providers by being more responsive to needs of their specific local community, and by changing the types of qualifications offered – the range of learners that providers were engaging with had changed significantly.

Of those surveyed, when asked whether the profile of provision at the organisation had changed since the introduction of the reforms, between 20% and 26% of providers said this was not relevant in their context and 2% to 3% said they did not know.

However, among those providing a response (**Figure 24**), almost four in ten providers (37%) said the number of full-time learners had increased since the introduction of the reforms. A further 26% said the number had decreased, leaving 37% saying the number had remained the same. The number of part-time learners was more likely to have decreased (44%) than increased (26%). Slightly fewer providers (30%) said that the number of learners on short courses had increased than said (35%) that they had decreased.

FE colleges were much more likely to say that the number of part-time learners (73%) and learners on short courses (51%) had decreased than private providers (27% for each learner type) or ‘other’ providers (40% and 27% respectively). There were no significant differences in terms of trends in numbers of full-time learners.

Figure 25: Changes to the profile of provision



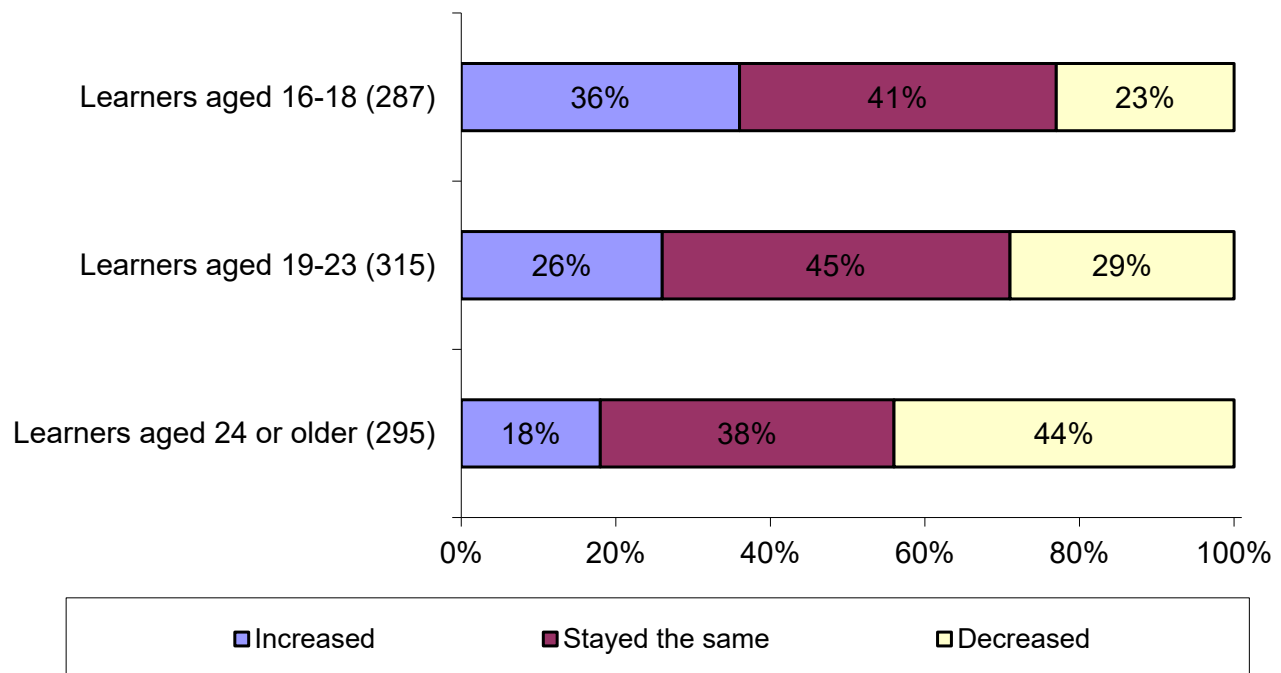
Q1D, all respondents (valid responses only), bases shown in brackets

Among those providers able to provide a response, more than a third (36%) said that the number of learners aged 16-18 had increased since the reforms, whilst just under a quarter (23%) said they had decreased. Learners aged 19-23 were almost equally likely

to have increased (26%) as decreased (29%). However, learners aged 24 or older were more likely to have decreased in numbers (44%) than to have increased (18%).

In terms of differences by provider type, FE colleges were more likely to say that learners aged 16-18 had increased (44% compared with 36% of private providers and 23% of 'other' providers). In contrast, they were more likely to say that learners aged 24 or older (76% compared with 34% of private providers and 26% of 'other' providers) or aged 19-23 (63% compared with 17% and 16% respectively) had decreased in numbers.

Figure 26: Changes to the age profile of learners

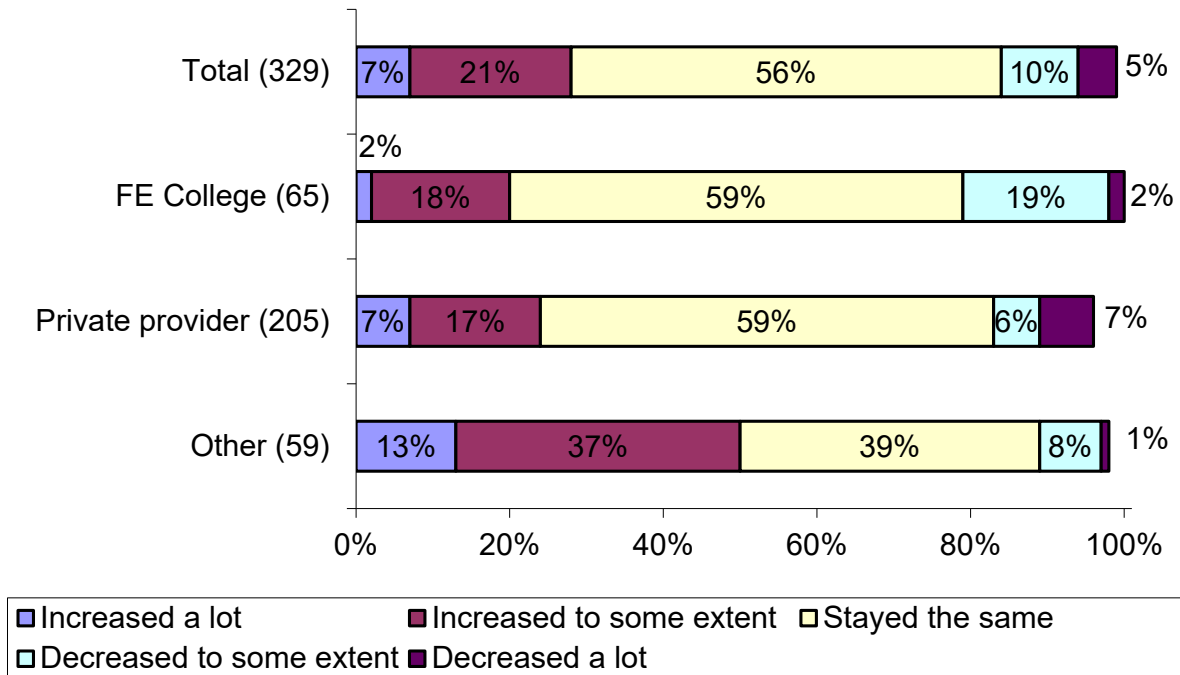


Q1E, all respondents (valid responses only), bases shown in brackets

More than half of providers (56%) felt that the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds had not changed since the reforms (see **Figure 26**). However, 27% said they had increased a lot/to some extent compared with 14% who said they had decreased a lot/to some extent.

FE colleges and private providers were more likely to say the numbers had not changed (59% each compared with 39% of 'other' providers), whilst 'other' providers were more likely to say they had increased a lot/to some extent (50% compared with 23% of private providers and 20% of FE colleges).

Figure 27: Changes in the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds



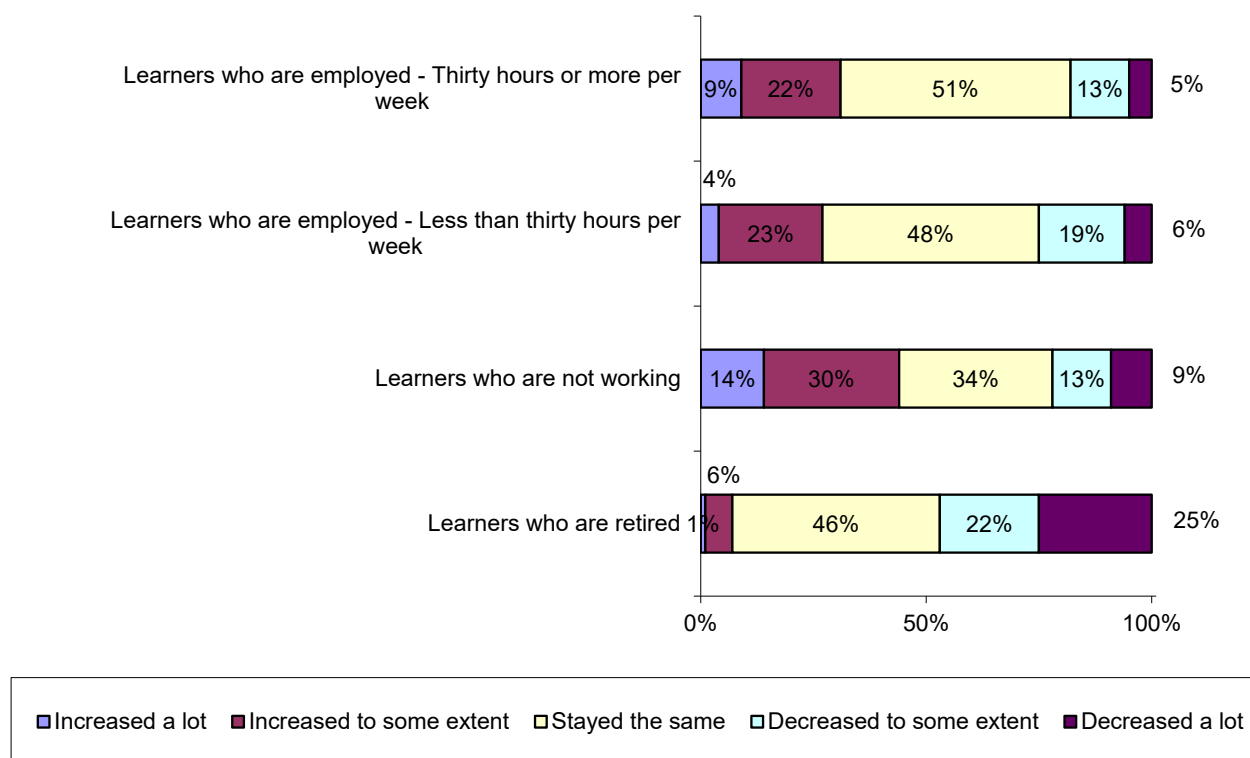
Q1F, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

Providers were also asked to what extent the number of learners of different working statuses had changed at their organisations since the introduction of the reforms (see **Figure 27**).

Forty-four per cent of providers said that learners who were not working had increased a lot/to some extent since the reforms, whilst 30% said this of learners who were employed 30+ hours per week and 27% of learners who were employed <30 hours per week. These were higher proportions than for providers reporting decreases. The only group that was more likely to have decreased in numbers than increased was retired learners (47% 'decreased' and 7% 'increased' respectively).

FE colleges (41%) and private providers (32%) were more likely to say learners employed 30+ hours had increased in numbers (compared with 10% of 'other' providers). In contrast, 'other' providers were more likely to say that those not working (78%) or working <30 hours per week (45%) had increased (compared with 37% and 28% of FE colleges and 34% and 20% of private providers respectively).

Figure 28: Changes in the numbers of learners with different working statuses

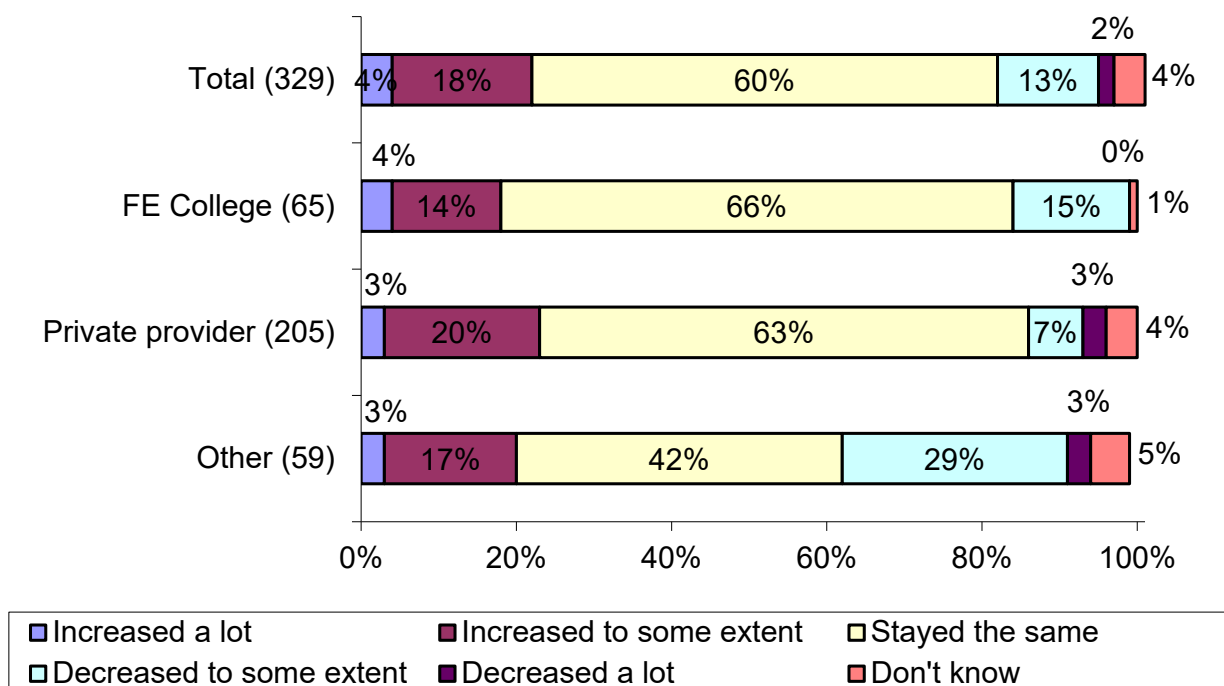


Q1G, all respondents (valid responses only), base=329

Overall, six in ten providers (60%) reported that the average level of prior qualifications held by their organisation's learners had not changed since the introduction of the reforms (**Figure 28**). Of the remainder, 22% said they had increased a lot/to some extent and 15% said they had decreased a lot/to some extent.

'Other' providers were more likely to say they had decreased overall (33% compared with 15% of FE colleges and 10% of private providers) with the latter two types of provider being more likely to say they had not changed.

Figure 29: Changes in the average level of prior qualifications held by learners



Q1H, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

Influence of other, external factors

Many providers interviewed in-depth emphasised that FE Reform and the changes made as a result cannot be seen as isolated. They noted changing budgets, schools failing to support young people to achieve English and maths GCSEs, and increased competition for learners from sixth forms following the raising of the participation age, as competing issues that strongly influence their responses and behaviours.

The overall reduction to funding was seen as a particular change that could not be disentangled from the FE Reform programme, given that they have taken place side-by-side

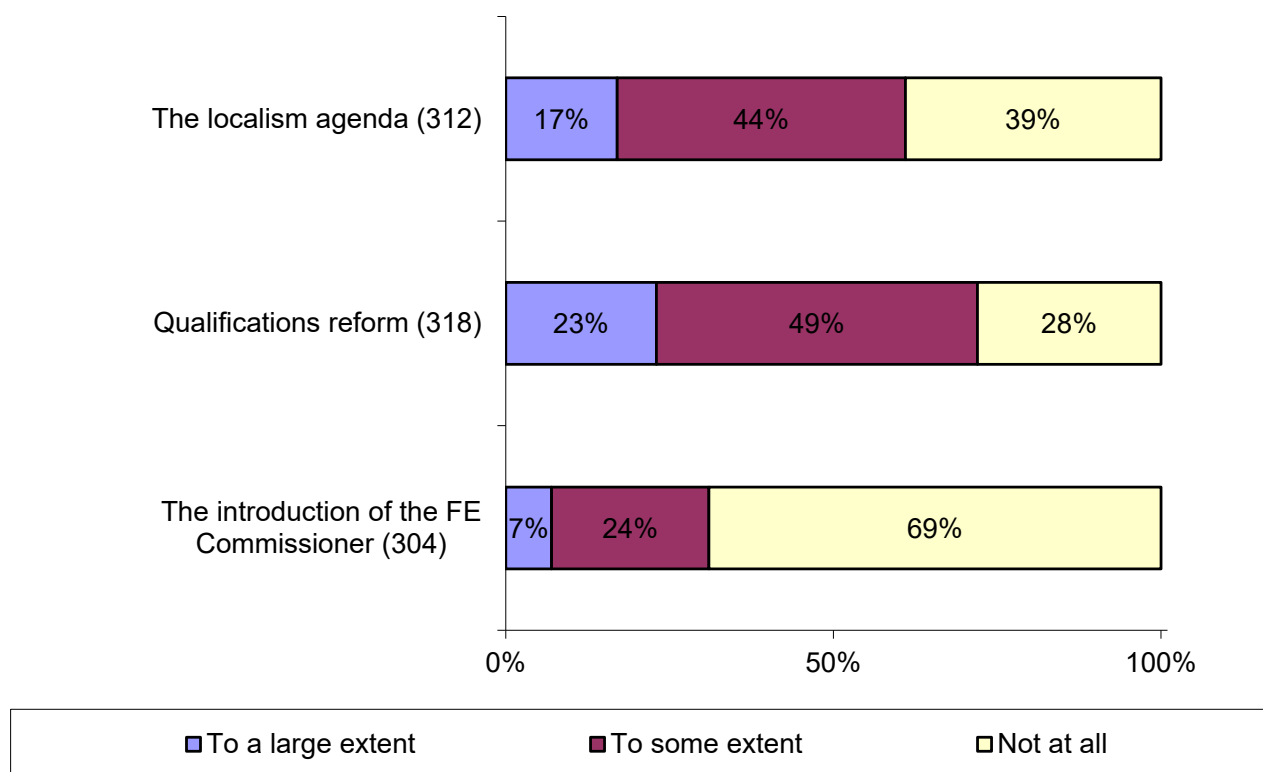
'I would say that it's quite difficult to disentangle from the cuts programme, because they obviously have gone in parallel, and there's no doubt for us that the funding changes have had a bigger impact than the FE reform programme.'
(General FE College)

Further to this, when surveyed providers were asked to what extent additional influences have contributed to any reported changes in provider behaviour, about half of providers responding to the question (49%) said the qualifications reform had 'to some extent' influenced changes, and a further 23% 'to a large extent' (**Figure 29**). Just over four in ten (44%) said the localism agenda had 'to some extent' influenced changes and 17% 'to a

large extent'. However, the introduction of the FE Commissioner had not influenced changes at all according to 63% of providers.

Qualifications reform was more likely to be mentioned as an influence 'to a large extent' among 'other' providers (39%) and FE colleges (31%) than among private providers (14%), as was the localism agenda among 'other' providers (30%) compared with FE colleges (17%) and private providers (13%). FE colleges were more likely to find the introduction of the FE Commissioner an influence to a large extent (19% compared with 3% private providers and 4% of other providers).

Figure 30: Extent to which additional influences have contributed to reported changes



Q16, all respondents (valid responses only), bases shown in brackets

Expected changes following the FE Reform programme

Surveyed providers were also asked how they expected further changes in budget to impact on different aspects of their courses and qualifications (see **Figure 30**)

The data shows that:

- Many more providers (54%) expect decreases in the number of courses they offer than expected increases (15%).
- Proportions anticipating a wider or narrower range of qualification *levels* were balanced. In addition, 27% of providers think that, while their range of qualifications will remain the same, the range will have a different internal composition.

- Rather more providers (24%) expect their range of qualification *types* to narrow than expect it to expand (20%). Again, a further group, in this case of 24% of providers, expect the range to remain constant but to change in its internal composition.
- And, similarly, rather more providers (19%) expect the number of guided learning hours to fall than expect the number to rise.

Across each of these expectations, FE colleges were more likely than other types of provider to expect the ‘negative’ consequence.

Figure 31: The impact of further changes in budget on provision

	% providers that expect increase	% providers that expect decrease	% providers that expect they stay the same	% providers that expect they stay the same but alter composition
Number of courses offered	15%	54%	31%	NA
Qualification levels	18%	19%	36%	27%
Qualification types	20%	24%	32%	24%
Guided learner hours	14%	19%	41%	NA

Q19A-D, all respondents, base=329

This picture is supported by interviews with several providers which commented that they intended to further develop or refine their offer. Particular examples of planned changes included:

- Increasing Level 3 and 4 offer, in some cases as a direct response to the introduction of loans for learners aged 24+.
- Increasing the number of apprenticeships they offered as they believed this is where the Government’s policy emphasis and, therefore, most available funding would be targeted in the future.
- Diversifying where they received funding from, with less emphasis on SFA and EFA work, and intentions to seek European funding.
- Increasing the volume of e-learning offered.
- Starting to offer Traineeships and Trailblazers.

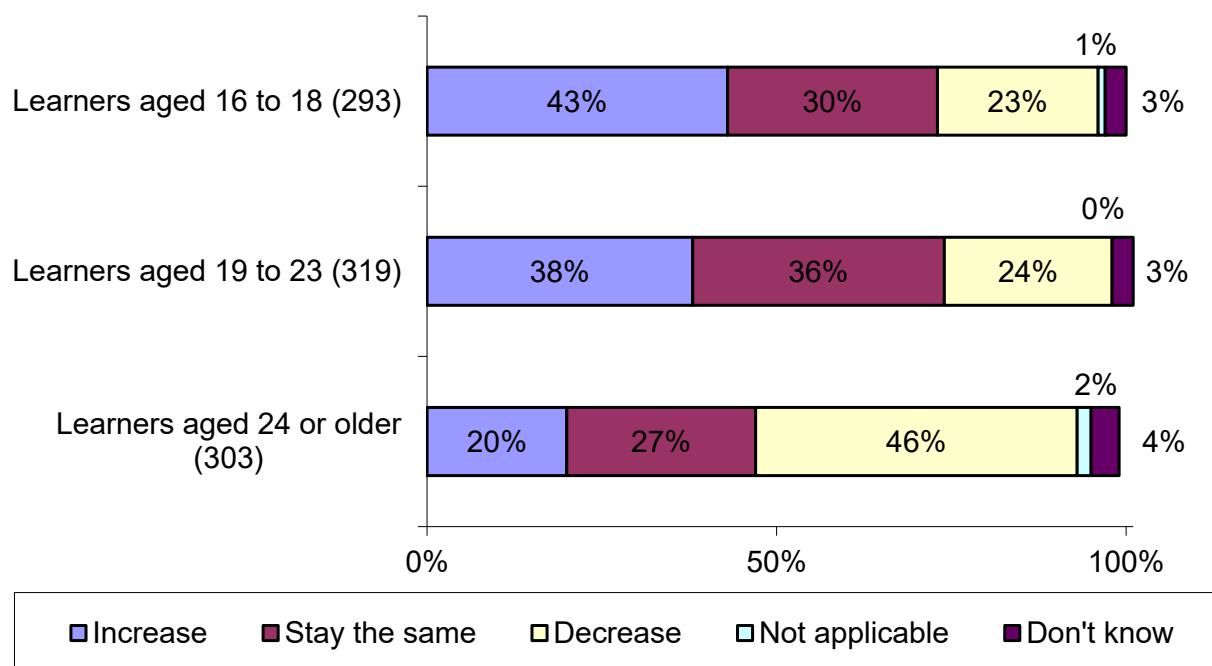
Providers were also asked how they expected the age profile of their learners to change in the next four years (see **Figure 31**).

More than four in ten providers (43%) expected learners aged 16 to 18 to increase in the next four years, whilst 30% expected the number to stay the same, and 23% to decrease. Slightly smaller proportions of providers (38%) expected learners aged 19 to 23 to increase, with a similar proportion expecting them to stay the same (36%) and a quarter to decrease (24%).

A much higher proportion of providers (46%) expected learners aged 24 or older to decrease, with 27% expecting the number to stay the same and 20% to increase.

FE colleges were more likely to expect both learners aged 24 or older (65%) and aged 19 to 23 (53%) to decrease than private providers (38% and 15% respectively) and 'other' providers (45% and 9% respectively). However, they were more likely to expect learners aged 16 to 18 to stay the same (43% compared with 28% of private providers and 20% of 'other' providers).

Figure 32: Expected changes in the age profile of learners in the next 4 years



Q20A, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

Overall, four in ten providers (40%) expected the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds to stay the same in the next 4 years (see **Figure 32**). In contrast, 33% expected them to increase a lot/to some extent and 22% expected them to decrease a lot/to some extent.

'Other' providers were more likely to expect disadvantaged learners to increase (59% compared with 33% of private providers and 18% of FE Colleges) whilst FE colleges were more likely to expect them to decrease (38% compared with 17% of both private providers and 'other' providers).

Figure 33: Expected changes in the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds in the next 4 years

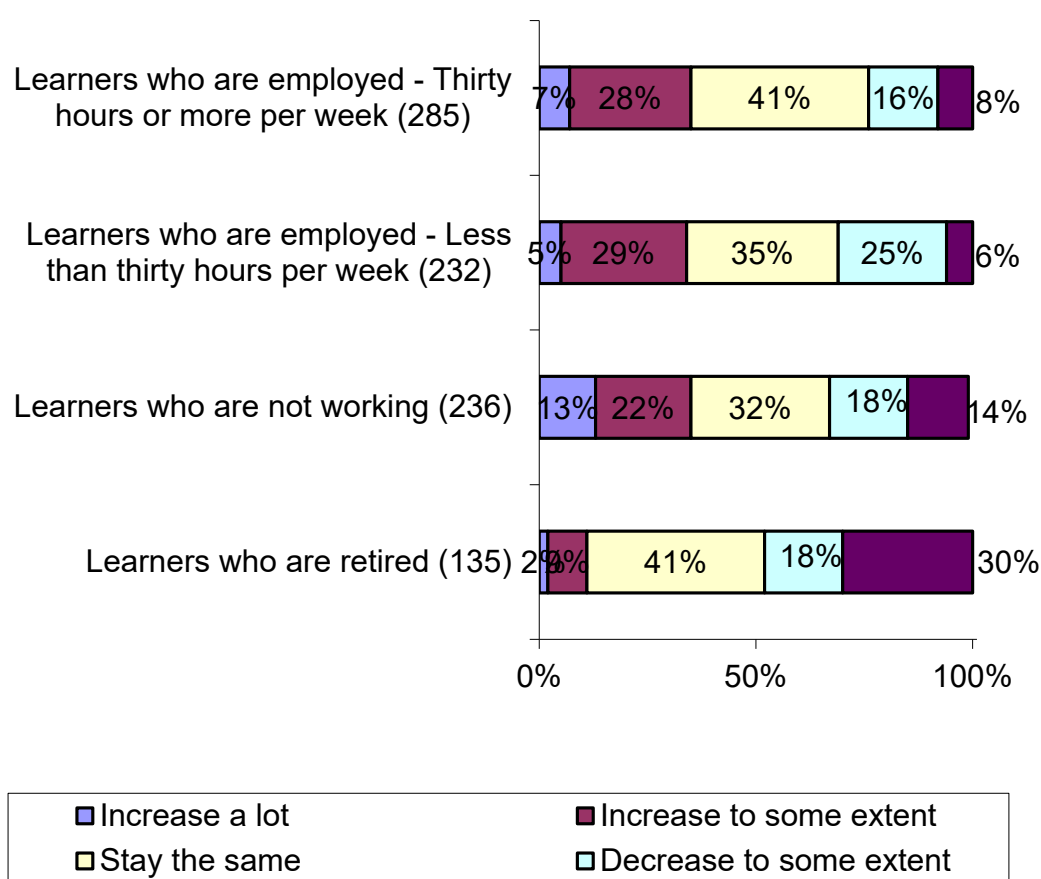
	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Increase a lot	9%	2%	7%	24%
Increase to some extent	25%	16%	25%	35%
Stay the same	40%	39%	45%	22%
Decrease to some extent	12%	21%	9%	14%
Decrease a lot	10%	18%	8%	4%
Don't know	5%	5%	6%	1%

Q20B, all respondents, bases shown in table

Providers were asked to what extent they would expect the number of learners with different working statuses to change in the next 4 years as a result of the reforms (see **Figure 33**).

Overall, providers were more likely to expect the number of learners with different working statuses to stay the same in the next 4 years: 41% said this of learners employed 30+ hours per week, 35% of learners working <30 hours per week, 32% of learners not working, and 41% of retired learners. The remaining providers were generally divided as to whether learners with different working statuses were likely to increase or decrease but with expectations of increases tending to be a little more frequent than expectations of decreases – the exception to this concerning retired learners where decreases were much more frequently seen as likely than were increases.

Figure 34: Expected changes in the number of learners from different working statuses in the next 4 years



Q20C, where have different types of learners (valid responses only) , bases shown in brackets

Overall, just under half of providers (48%) expected the average level of the prior qualifications held by learners to stay the same (see **Figure 34**). 35% expected them to increase a lot/to some extent, whilst 14% expected them to decrease a lot/to some extent.

There were few differences by provider type, though 'other' providers (23%) and FE colleges (19%) were more likely to expect them to decrease than private providers (9%).

Figure 35: Expected changes in the average level of the prior qualifications held by learners

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Increase a lot	4%	2%	4%	3%
Increase to some extent	31%	31%	32%	29%
Stay the same	48%	44%	51%	41%
Decrease to some extent	10%	17%	7%	9%
Decrease a lot	4%	2%	2%	14%
Don't know	4%	4%	4%	5%

Q20D, all respondents, bases shown in table

Potential future changes identified by providers interviewed in depth interviews were mostly structural. Several providers discussed increasing their levels of partnerships or of involvement with other learning providers. One college reported that they may enter into a federation or merger in the upcoming years, whilst one private provider was considering becoming an academy or studio school sponsor to help provide a clear pathway for their apprenticeships:

'I'd want to sponsor through school, probably a studio school, where people specialised at fourteen. So come through secondary education. At fourteen, they'd specialise. So, I could use that to feed my apprenticeships for engineering specialist construction. I'd want us to have level two and three provision here, and I'd want us to be at the new enterprise zone, delivering level four plus.' (Private Provider)

Some providers also emphasised the need for sustainability, commenting on the need to ensure staff levels are appropriate and the staff are appropriately trained to ensure that change to English and Maths provision and increased use of IT can be fully realised. Further to this, one provider was exploring becoming an AQA-accredited GCSE centre.

The continued need to increase and improve engagement with employers to help best plan and develop provision was identified as a key area for future development. Whilst providers typically thought that they had improved these relationships since the start of the FE Reform programme, they also thought that relationships needed to be sustained and built on.

Finally, it should be noted that many providers did not feel able at the time of interview to comment on future plans. Several were waiting to find out more information about future Government plans and what the impact of these would be before they would decide their exact course of action.

5. Introduction of loans for people aged 24+ studying at levels 3 and 4

Key findings

The introduction of 24+ loans has been a significant change in the FE and skills funding landscape, presenting opportunities and challenges for the sector. Provider attitudes towards the policy and the changes they have made in response to it vary. These changes include securing alternative funding sources, recruiting new staff to support the loans process, and making revisions to the learning offer. For some providers the policy has resulted in an increase in learner participation. However, for most providers this has not been the case with many reporting a decline in adult participation. Changes in learner numbers were considerable for some providers.

Perceived impact

The majority of FE providers involved in the study indicated that 24+ loans policy has impacted upon them, although the nature and extent of this impact differs quite considerably. Some providers had identified and were pursuing potential growth areas. The indication was that there is good take-up of loans for some types of provision, for example, Access to Higher Education. It appears that some providers are engaging more pro-actively with the policy as it becomes more embedded into the funding landscape and that it can open up opportunities for some adults to learn where finance is otherwise proving prohibitive.

However, low interest and take-up of loans by particular groups of learners, including those from disadvantaged communities was a real concern for some providers and there is some evidence that the introduction of loans is leading to a decline in participation and provision at Level 3 and above. Some providers are particularly critical of the policy and concerned about its possible extension.

Unanticipated consequences

Very low take-up of loans for apprenticeship provision led to the scrapping of the loans approach in respect of advanced and higher-level apprenticeships. However, it appears that the negative impact on apprenticeship participation of the policy is still being felt by some providers.

Advanced learning loans were introduced in 2013/14, following the removal of grant funding, to maintain support for adults aged 24 and over to learn study at advanced and higher levels. The intention was to maintain a route into learning for those who could not

afford the upfront costs of their learning. For the last two years, adults aged 24+ studying a qualification at Level 3 or 4³² have had the option to pay for their course fees (in full or part) with a loan. Learners repay their loan once they have left the course and their earnings reach £21,000 per year.³³

In *New Challenges, New Chances* the Government anticipated that this would lead to a decline in learner numbers and set out the reasons for this change to the funding landscape:

‘Although funding for participation is expected to fall during the Spending Review period, by introducing income contingent loans we have protected access to learning. The loans provide a strong financial package, removing the upfront cost of training, and ensuring that no learner starts repayment until they can afford to do so.’

Government signalled its intention to work closely with colleges, training providers, and key stakeholders to support successful implementation of the policy. Such support has included development funding for providers, research into provider and learner experiences of loans, and production of a wide-range of information and guidance material for both providers and learners.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

The survey findings show that the vast majority of providers were aware of the introduction of 24+ loans, and, for two-thirds of providers surveyed, this policy had made an impact on their organisation. The findings of the qualitative interviews confirm – and provide greater insight into – the different impacts of loans for providers which were revealed by the survey.

A few providers interviewed have developed and marketed new provision following the introduction of 24+ loans. Three providers spoke of the growth opportunities that had resulted for higher level learning from this new financial model. As one GFE College commented:

‘We’ve been heavily promoting, along with a lot of other colleges I think as well, courses that 24+ loans apply to... We’ve closed some courses, nobody could study them because there’s no funding for them, and we’ve developed and opened other courses which fall into the 24+ loan category.’ (General FE College)

³² Learners must be studying at a Skills Funding Agency approved college or training organisation to be eligible for a 24+ loan. In March 2014, regulations came in to force to remove apprenticeships from 24+ loans.

³³ Learners make repayments at nine per cent of annual earnings above £21,000. Any outstanding balance is written off after 30 years.

Another provider spoke of seeking the advice of other training organisations in their region on ways to stimulate loans-funded learning. This led to their modelling an approach adopted by a provider who had been successful in rapidly growing their 24+ loans provision – and they saved time and resource through this sharing of good practice.

It was evident from the qualitative interviews that some providers are starting to engage more actively with the loans agenda now it is moving into its third year of implementation. Following two years of loans being available to learners, providers are better informed about the types of courses that are viable to run under a system of loans. As one provider reflected:

'We've been surprised by some learners still taking up loans in areas where we thought they might not, and, conversely, surprised by people being loan-averse in areas where we thought they'd have more confidence.' (General FE College)

One provider spoke of reviewing their provision to ensure a balance was available for adults between fully-funded provision and provision that could be funded through loans. One college had found its existing provision had not proved attractive to 'loans learners' and was now in the process of re-shaping it in order to improve this:

'The loans, we've found challenging...we've lost a load of money because we've never used more than half of the loan facility that's been available to us...I think we're now at a point where we're kind of saying 'Okay, these are the kinds of courses that we need to be running in order to use the loans.' I think we made an assumption that it was just another funding route for students to stay on the same courses, and that's not worked at all.' (General FE College)

Several providers highlighted a particularly good take-up of 24+ loans for Access to HE provision. It was felt that there were stronger incentives for learners to take out a loan to fund this type of provision, including the loan being written off should they progress to university and complete their course. One provider had experienced a positive impact of loans on their health and social care provision:

'I think it had a positive impact... in terms of some of the access courses that we run... whether it's just about the noise in the system that it's available, or whether it's the fact that it gets wiped when they move into university, I don't know, but that has been positive and we've seen an increase.' (Private Provider)

'I think with HE, there is a stronger argument in terms of the earning potential... I think where we have really done well, access to HE...I think there is a real incentive... and it's almost the means to the end, not the end.' (General FE College)

Alongside reports by providers of loans being taken out by learners to fund certain types of provision – or alternatively learners opting to self-fund – examples were also given of provision which had not generated such demand. Several private training providers referred to the low take-up of loans for apprenticeships provision when advanced-level and higher-level apprenticeships were within scope of the policy.

Although Government changed the funding arrangements for 24+ apprenticeships in early 2014 making them eligible for adult skills funding, some providers reported learner numbers are still below what they had been prior to loans:

‘24-plus learning loans... hit apprenticeships in a major way... we lost a massive amount of numbers. That has been slow to come back, even after the change. I don’t think we’ve recouped where we were.’ (Private Provider)

‘They allowed the market to decline for about six months because nobody took out loans and then we went back to square one. I think that kind of thing, doesn’t give any credence to well thought ideas.’ (Private Provider)

One provider spoke of refocusing its provision towards younger learners due to low take up of 24+ loans by adults. Another provider, critical of the policy, had opted to secure alternative (European) funding to enable the continuation of its adult provision, anticipating that for the organisation and its learners the introduction of loans would have proved detrimental.

Why changes were made

24+ loans are now a key part of the funding landscape. Evidence from the qualitative interviews shows that different providers and learners perceive and have responded to loans in a variety of ways.

A small number of providers interviewed spoke of the actions taken to support the successful implementation of loans, for example, making new staff appointments, identifying, developing and marketing new provision, and targeted recruitment activities.

As highlighted by one specialist FE provider delivering part-time adult provision, they are now able to target specific groups and communities where finance had been a major barrier to participation in learning:

‘That’s been very successful for us...students who’ve been on benefits had been having to pay a fee before...they were not entitled to fully-funded courses...at the moment they don’t have to pay anything upfront.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

This provider had also invested resource early on in the loans implementation process to ensure that learners who wished to progress to higher levels of learning were aware of

the introduction of 24+ loans and that this was one of a number of options available to them to fund further study. They spoke to learners on Level 1 and Level 2 programmes to raise their awareness of loans, explain what loans meant for them, and how the loans system works.

Around ten providers interviewed spoke of facing challenges in promoting 24+ loans to their learners. One provider noted there was work to be done to change the mindset of some individuals who view loans in a negative way:

'You take out a loan and you pay for a course, and if as a result of that you get a better job and earn more then you have to pay it back, and if you don't, you don't. When you think it through you go 'it's a no brainer' but...just because it's a loan and their perceptions, partly culturally, some people just don't worry about it but other groups of communities do.' (General FE College)

Several providers indicated that they felt that adults from disadvantaged areas were particularly reluctant to take out a loan, and there was a perception that official data on loan applications would evidence this. Providers put forward examples of low/no take-up of loans for some courses – and examples of individuals taking out a loan only where they were confident that they would never have to re-pay it:

'The whole loan thing has been a challenge, because you're trying to make people who are very risk averse... take out loans. Quite frankly, the ones that do take out loans will never pay them back in a million years. They are always going to make sure that they stay under that threshold.' (General FE College)

'There still is a good proportion of people, certainly in our area, whereby the notion of having a loan is just so alien to them and is just not conducive for their learning... they're just averse to the loan...so they don't even look at it, so you can't have that conversation that helps them.' (General FE College)

A number of possible explanations for the low take-up of loans were raised. A few providers suggested it may relate to learners not considering some types of learning as worthy of investment – raising questions about the benefits of learning and how these are communicated to prospective learners:

'I think for every 50 people you talk to, you might get two or three that say, 'Yes, we'll go with it'.' (Private Provider)

'I think people tend to traditionally still think of them as something that you take out for uni.' (Private Provider)

One provider suggested that employees aged 24+ did not always recognise the benefits for themselves of investing in work-related training - instead perceiving the benefits to be largely for their employer. As such they were not inclined to take out a loan:

'The learner is saying, 'Why should I be taking out the loan to improve my skills for that company?' (Private Provider)

As reported earlier, one private training provider critical of the loans policy had deliberately sought alternative funding for their provision. This meant that learners have not had to consider taking out a loan to fund their study and the provider has not as yet had to implement changes to support a move towards loans funding:

'The reason why we made an effort to side-step it was because our perception was, it wouldn't work out. It might work for other people... it hasn't had a huge effect because we've managed to get funding from elsewhere, but it would have had a disastrous effect...my opinion is that very few, if any, would have taken the opportunity.' (Private Provider)

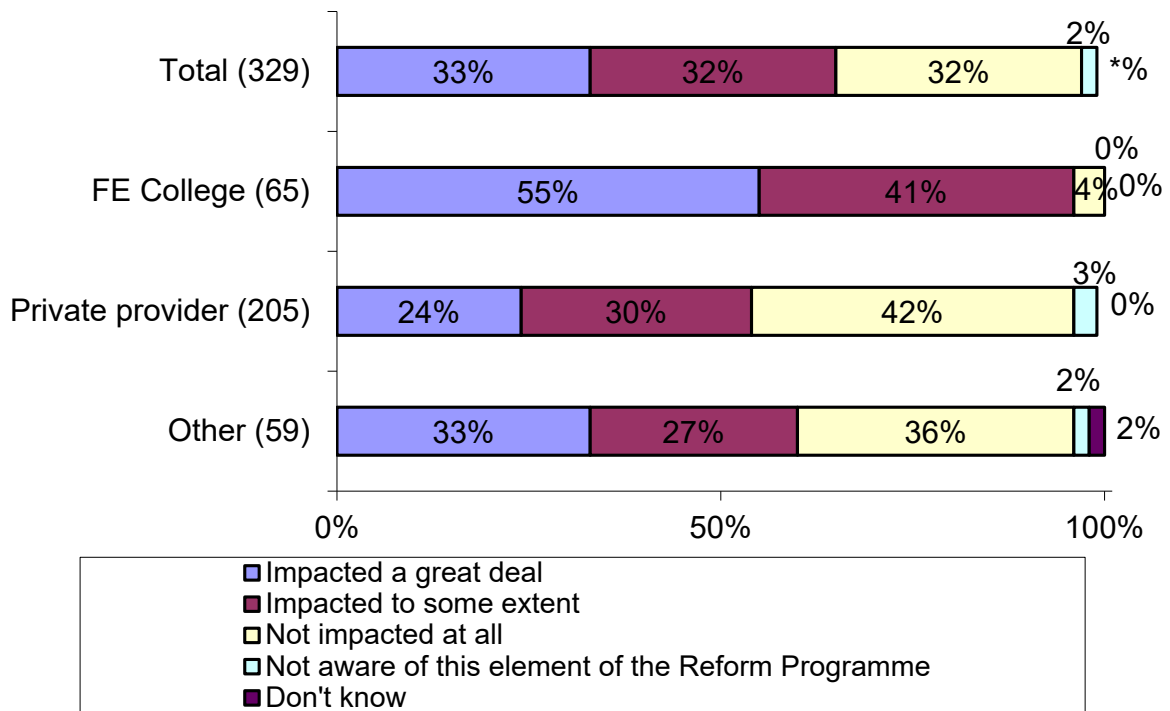
For another provider, loans funding had not proved effective in sustaining their existing provision. There had been low take-up of loans by adults and as such they had re-focused their offer towards younger learners to reflect the changing profile of learners.

Perceived impact of the changes

In the provider survey, findings (**Figure 35** following) reveal that the impact of the introduction of 24+loans on providers has been quite varied with similar proportions of respondents reporting each response: 'great deal', 'to some extent' or 'not at all' (33%, 32% and 32% respectively).

FE colleges (55%) were more likely to feel it had impacted a great deal on their organisation, with most of the remainder (41%) saying it had impacted on them to some extent. Private providers (42%) and 'other' providers (36%) were more likely to say it had not impacted on their organisation at all.

Figure 36: Extent to which the introduction of loans for people aged 24+, studying at levels 3 and 4, has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_1, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

Four in ten providers (40%) said that the introduction of loans had made no impact on the numbers of learners (see **Figure 36** following). In contrast, more than a third (36%) said it had decreased numbers, whilst about one in seven (15%) said it had increased numbers.

Views again differed by provider type, with FE colleges (55%) and 'other' providers (44%) more likely to say numbers had decreased (compared with 25% of private providers), whilst private providers (49%) were more likely to say numbers had not changed (compared with 39% of 'other' providers and 21% of FE Colleges).

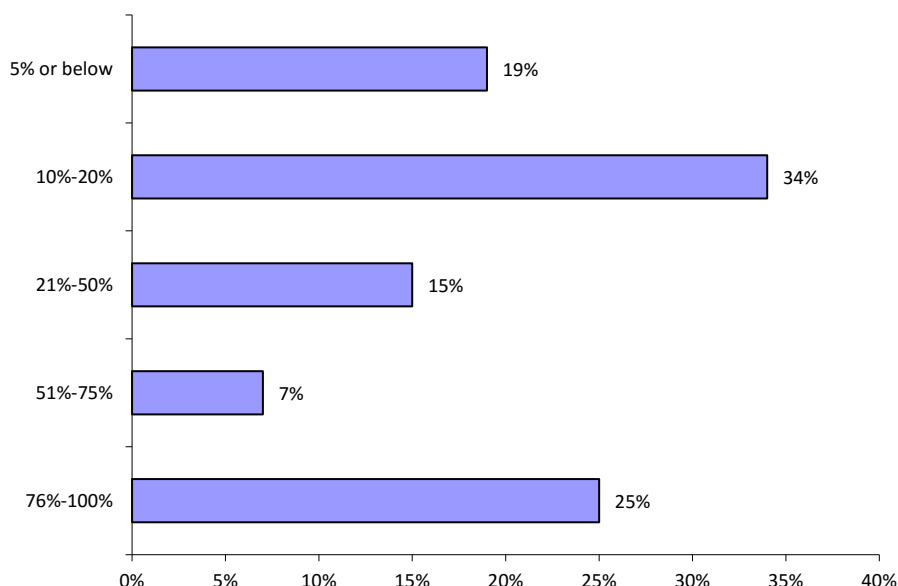
Figure 37: The impact of loans for learners on the number of learners

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	321	65	198	58
Increase in the number of learners	15%	20%	15%	6%
Decrease in the number of learners	36%	55%	25%	44%
No change	40%	21%	49%	39%
Don't know	9%	3%	11%	11%

Q15A, all respondents except those not aware of the introduction of loans for people aged 24+, studying at levels 3 and 4, bases shown in table

Among those providers saying that numbers had increased and who provided a response, a quarter said the increase had been at least 76%, and just over one in five 10%. This results in an average percentage increase of 39%. It should be noted that the base number for this analysis (**Figure 37**) was low (36 cases):

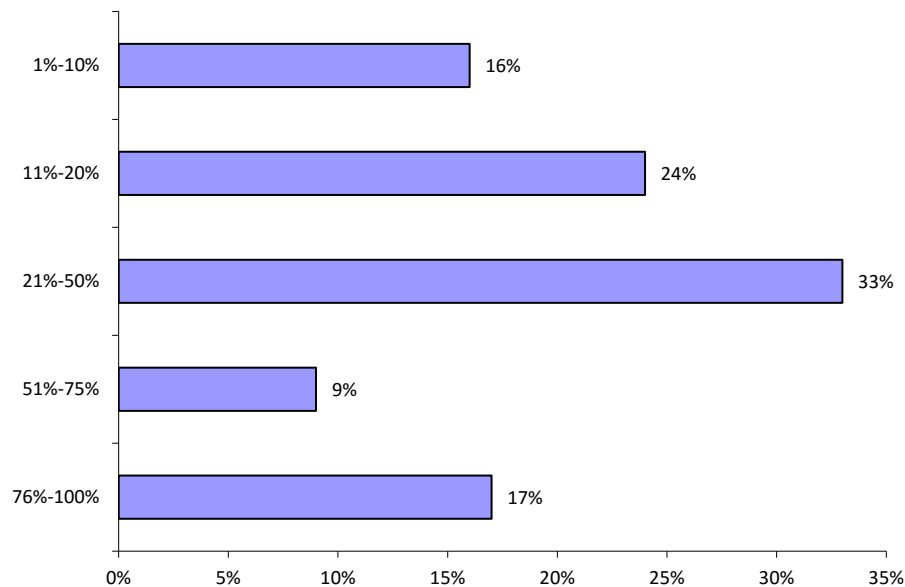
Figure 38: Increase in number of learners; percentages of respondents reporting an increase who reported different percentage increases in numbers



Q15A_2A, where loans for learners has caused an increase in the number of learners (valid responses only), base=36

Among those mentioning a decrease in number of learners (see **Figure 38**), the range varied from just over three in five reporting a decrease of 20% or less to almost one in five reporting a decrease of 75% or more. The average decrease was 40%. Again, a low respondent base, of 82 cases, should be noted.

Figure 39: Percentage decrease in number of learners

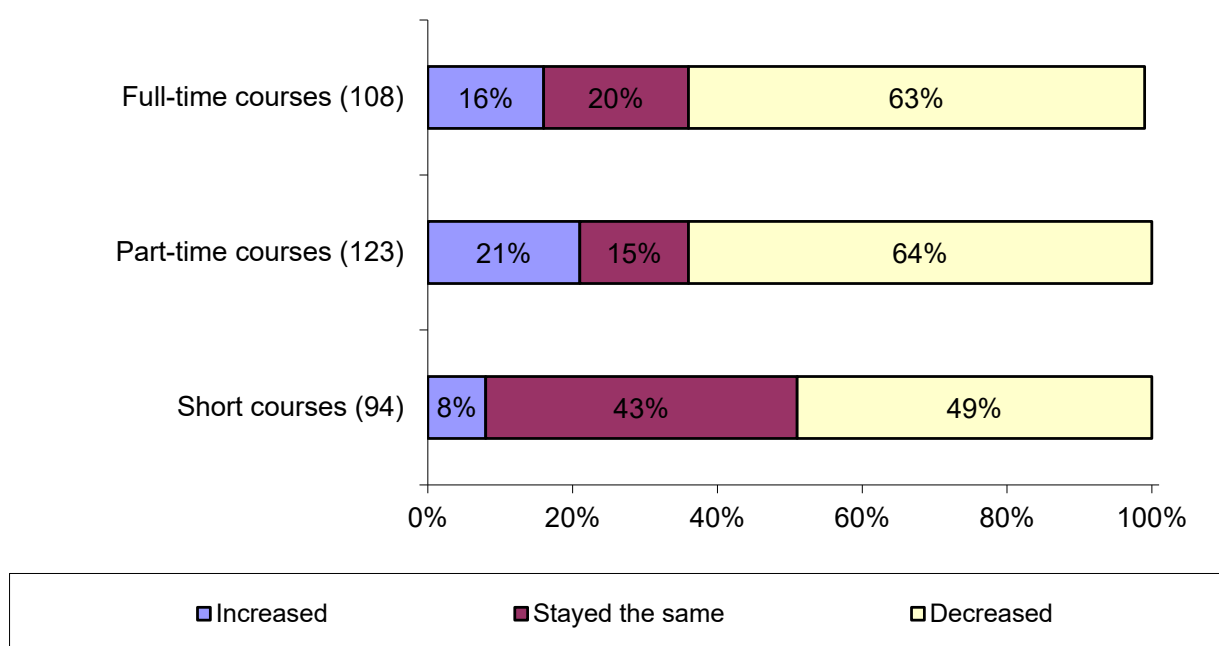


Q15A_2B, where loans for learners has caused a decrease in the number of learners (valid responses only), base=82

Overall, decreases in participation were equally felt in respect of full- and part-time courses but loans had had lesser negative impact on participation in short courses (see **Figure 39**). Increases in participation were much less frequent.

There were no significant differences between different types of provider in terms of the impact of loans for learners on the numbers undertaking each type of course.

Figure 40: The impact of loans for learners on the number of learners undertaking different types of courses

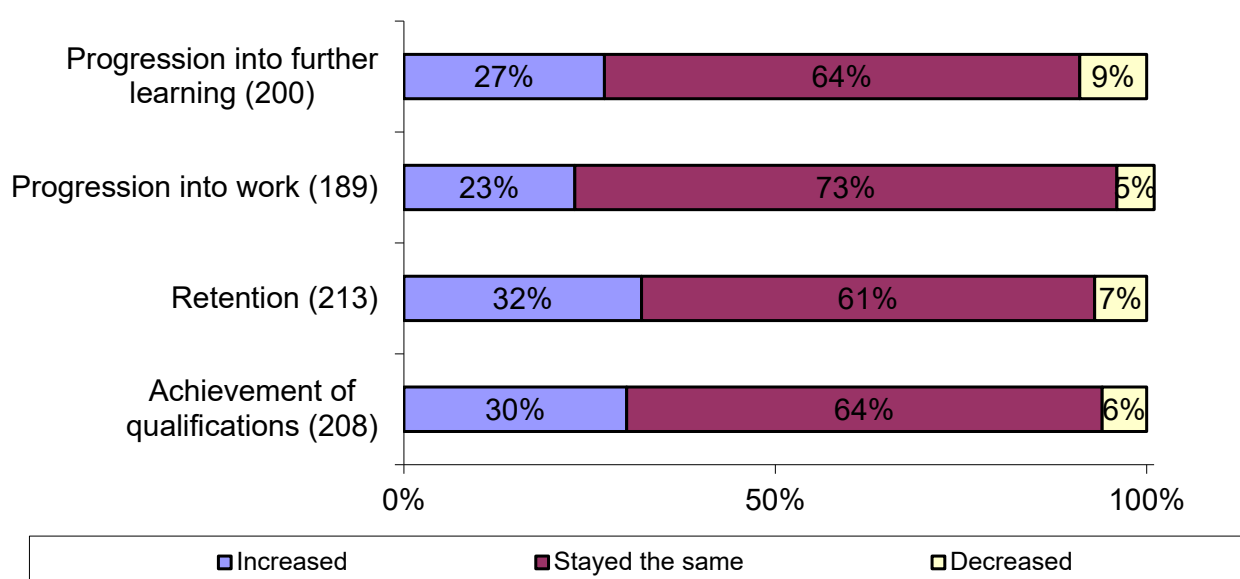


Q15B, where loans for learners has caused an increase or decrease in the number of learners (valid responses only), bases shown in brackets

Overall, the majority of providers (see **Figure 40**) felt there was no impact of loans for learners on the numbers undertaking different progression routes (ranging from 61% to 73% across the different routes). In contrast, between a quarter and a third felt there had been an increase in the number of learners undertaking different routes, particularly for retention (32%) and achievement of qualifications (30%).

There were few differences across provider type, apart from 'other' providers being more likely to say the number of learners progressing into further learning had stayed the same (80% compared with 67% of private providers and 52% of FE Colleges) and FE Colleges being more likely to say that the number of learners progressing into further learning had increased (43% compared with 20% of private providers and 15% of 'other' providers).

Figure 41: The impact of loans for learners on the number of learners undertaking different patterns of progression



Q15C, all respondents except those not aware of the introduction of loans for people aged 24+, studying at levels 3 and 4 (valid responses only) , bases shown in brackets

Data from the qualitative research confirms the mixed picture generated by analysis of survey findings. Several providers reported *positive* impacts for both themselves and their learners as a result of loans, indicating they had strategies in place to grow their offer and attract more ‘loans learners’. Feedback from a few providers indicated a good take-up of loans for some types of learning giving the impression that learner numbers had held up if not increased as a result. A few providers also referred to an increasing (albeit slow) trend in take-up of loans, arguably as a result of the policy becoming embedded and provider and learner knowledge and awareness increasing. A couple of providers spoke of loans playing a role in opening up learning to some individuals and supporting adult participation, especially given the context of significant reductions to the Adult Skills Budget:

‘If you can get your head around taking out a loan then you can study.’ (General FE College)

It was noted by several providers that loans have proved attractive to some adults– for example, those who are self-employed and can see the value of their investment:

‘You get some very enterprising people ... if they’ve got their own business and hairdressing is one of the most enterprising... They have seen this because they really want to develop and they see how it’s going to be beneficial to them and to their business.’ (General FE College)

Overall, however, the impact of loans reported in qualitative interviews tended to be *negative*. Providers spoke of ongoing challenges in implementing the policy and

reservations about the policy were frequent. Seven providers reported a drop in participation in learning among adults and attributed this, at least in part, to the introduction of 24+ loans. The exact reason behind this was not always expressed and it also was not clear to what extent, if any, providers had adapted their provision in light of the move to a loans system. It could be argued that there was a lack of demand for some existing provision from learners. However, feedback indicates that at least in some cases, for example a Level 3 childcare course, learners were keen to study but were put off by having to take out a loan to pay for it.

A few providers reported that they were unable to fully utilise their loans facility. One Adult and Community Learning provider spoke of a mismatch between the reduced funding available through the Adult Skills Budget (for which there is substantial demand) and the increased funding allocation available for 24+ loans (where there is too little demand). This provider voiced concern about a 'one size fits all' funding model and argued instead that funding available to providers should relate to the type of provision being demanded by local communities :

'Because we're driven down the demand road for English, maths, functional ICT, for example, we're oversubscribed in that provision. It then costs us to deliver if we go above that basic ASB allocation. We can't tap into any other funding. Now, a 24+ loan is aimed at those who are undertaking Level 3 learning, you know, that's the whole purpose of it, for which we don't have that significant demand' ('Other' Provider)

With loans funding now being an option for funding of learning previously supported by the Adult Skills Budget, an implication for providers of low take-up of loans is that they will have to cut costs (and therefore less viable courses) to balance their income and expenditure. This was alluded to by one college which spoke of finding it increasingly challenging to meet their loans allocation (which had increased significantly over the two years) and reported that this was having a negative impact on their staff and contributing to an overall decline in their adult learners:

'The first year we were pleased because we didn't have a huge allocation and we achieved it... We can't get anywhere near it now, it, kind of, disheartens the staff at the sharp end who are doing it. The number of people applying for loans is certainly nowhere near our allocation.' (General FE College)

Some providers were not able to attract learners to higher level provision due to a lack of demand locally:

'I can put out as many Level 3, Level 4 leadership and management qualifications as I want but not that many people want them.' (General FE College)

'It's difficult to go out and offer and provide Level 3 provision if your cohort or your need is about very basic entry level English and Maths.' ('Other' Provider)

Providers suggested that further work is needed with learners to develop understanding of the loans system and support increased engagement. One provider suggested that ‘a *cultural shift*’ was needed to encourage older learners to recognise the value of investing in further education. Another provider felt that take up of loans could be improved if other progression routes were valued – similar to how an Access to HE loan is written off if a learner goes on to university and completes their course:

‘If somebody moves into a higher-level apprenticeship, the loan doesn’t get wiped. So there’s no parity there between an applied route and an academic route. I think if government is serious about that messaging, they need to look at that.’ (Private Provider)

One provider – in the context of significant reductions to their adult skills budget – could see the potential of extending loans to 19-24 year olds to support their engagement in learning. This provider was aware of young people in this age group wanting to study but not being able to pay the course fees. Access to a loan would at least provide them with the option to study, although they recognised there would be work to do to persuade younger students to take out a loan:

‘I think that given the situation we’re in now, that the government should just move to loan funding for all adult provision... if you’re working in a college where they haven’t yet cut all of the adult budget, it may not seem so attractive. Once it’s all gone, then I’m now going to support loans, because it may be hard to persuade a 21-year-old that they need to take out a loan for their study, but it’s better than just saying, ‘No’.’ (General FE College)

Overall, feedback from providers in this study lend support to the findings of recent research into 24+ loans which showed that a number of providers are responding positively to the policy and are seeking to overcome challenges they are facing with implementation. However, there are strong concerns about the impact on the participation levels of some groups of learners.

6. Reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision

Key findings

Reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision have resulted in an increase in demand from learners of this age group and a corresponding re-focusing of provision upon their needs. FE colleges and private training providers report dedicating more time, teaching, and quality assurance staff to their 16-19 provision. Providers have invested in Continued Professional Development (CPD), staff recruitment; curriculum expansion, and enhancing relationships with schools, businesses and other training providers in a bid to boost recruitment of 16-19 year-olds in an increasingly competitive environment. Simultaneously, provision for and recruitment of learners aged 19 or over has reduced across both FE colleges and private providers.

Perceived impact

FE provision has been considerably revised as organisations attempt to meet the requirements of funding whilst balancing employer and local authority needs. Depending on the wider context, provision has either narrowed to facilitate specific recruitment targets or widened to spread the risks of non-achievement. This has resulted in widespread staffing changes with recruitment, retraining, redeployment, and redundancies experienced across providers. Funding for 16-19 year-olds is viewed as increasingly accessible and this has led to many post-19 learning offers being reduced or, in some cases, entirely removed. The post-19 provision that remains has become increasingly employer-led.

Unanticipated consequences

Intense competition for learners has led to changes in various departments including: Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), quality assurance, teaching and learning, recruitment practices, and the composition of learning offers. There have been an increasing number of mergers and acquisitions across the sector, with change anticipated to continue. The lag system of funding has proved challenging for smaller private and 'other' training providers which have struggled to produce successful business plans. There is concern that this makes it more difficult for smaller providers to be responsive to the needs of local businesses and partner organisations.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

Reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision have led a range of providers to significantly revise their provision. Seventeen of the fifty interviewees spoke about the 16-19 funding reforms, with general Further Education Colleges being more likely to speak at length on this topic. General Further Education Colleges are more likely to report systematic adoption of Study Programme principles in order to secure funding streams. This has included changes relating to maths and English provision, work placement regulations, and personal and social development learning. Many colleges and providers also report focusing upon reorganising teaching teams and quality assurance structures to ensure compliance with Study Programme principles. Private and 'other' training providers are less likely to report adopting Study Programme principles although around two-thirds of respondents in both categories nevertheless report experiencing significant or moderate impacts as a result of the 16-19 funding reform.

General Further Education colleges

In more detail, several general FE colleges reported focusing their 16-19 provision on Study Programmes. This has included: developing maths and English provision; converting existing Functional Skills to GCSE maths and English; promoting work experience placements to both learners and tutors; recruiting maths and English coordinators to oversee delivery of GCSE curricula; investing in Continued Professional Development for curriculum managers and tutors; redeploying staff as Personal Learning Coaches; increasing Information Advice and Guidance services; and, encouraging staff to plan teaching and learning around the needs of learners. This focusing of 16-19 provision is reflected in that fact that 49% of FE Colleges surveyed reported reducing the number of qualifications they offered, in order to provide coherence between the different strands of the Study Programme approach. This drew upon the perceived flexibility of the Study Programme approach and allowed staff to increasingly incorporate innovative teaching and learning methods. One college reported that this helped to provide increased structure and consistency to their learning offer from both a learner's and a tutor's perspective. The increased focus on 16-19 provision is reflected in the fact that 44% of colleges reported increases in the number of 16-18 year-olds registering with them.

A small number of colleges reported changes to their post-19 learning offer with the focus of provision being increasingly employer-led. Colleges reported taking the following steps: shortening post-19 programmes; stopping lengthy programmes including ESOL and modern language courses and evening classes in a variety of subjects; and developing short courses in association with local partner organisations including Jobcentre Plus. One college reported reducing the scope of A-Level provision in order to focus its learning offer and reduce costs. The same college also reported putting place clearer progression pathways to Level 3, FE, and HE study. These changes were accompanied by a decrease in the numbers of post-19 learners reported in survey by

63% of colleges (rising to 76% for learners aged 24 and over), and a decrease in part-time learners (reported by 44% of colleges).

Several colleges reported facing increased competition for learners aged 16-19. This often prompted colleges to improve their learning offer by offering a wider range of qualifications, offering maths and English GCSEs to all students, or up-skilling teaching staff.

Conversely, one college in Northern England reported a decline in the number of 16-18 year-olds registering. The college noted that this was a steeper decline than in the rest of the country but were unsure whether this was associated with the reforms they had implemented or other factors, including significant migration out of the area.

Private training providers

Several private training providers responded to the reforms by improving their maths and English provision. A number of providers recruited staff to enable them to achieve this. This in turn enhanced their learning offer and ensured that they were able to draw down funding under Study Programme regulations. One large private training provider reported increasing the number of academic courses (such as BTEC qualifications) which they offered as the 'substantial qualification' aspect of the Study Programme. This is further supported by the wider trend of private training providers offering an increased range of qualifications – in survey, 60% of providers reported increasing the breadth of their learning offer.

One private training provider reported developing relationships with local partners. They identified local businesses and schools which wanted to deliver vocational qualifications for 16-19 year-olds but were not equipped to do so. This provider offered specialist support and tutors to help these partners deliver vocational qualifications in the school environment.

A further provider reported recruiting a Teaching and Learning Coach to lead on staff monitoring and development. They implemented an observation schedule and Continued Professional Development activities to support staff who were adapting to delivering new programmes.

'Other' training providers

'Other' training providers reported changes in the number of 16-19 learners enrolling with them. This number decreased significantly from the previous year. The wider requirements of Study Programmes also impacted on 'other' training providers and they reported a lack of flexibility in relation to learners who wish to undertake additional part-time study. Due to problems drawing down funding, one provider felt increasingly unable

to offer part-time learning to 16-19 year-olds who were registered with an additional full-time provider.

One training provider offering Apprenticeships reported moving this provision to a 100%-subcontract model as part of its outsourcing of all of its provision. Overall, 27% of 'other' providers reported increasing their subcontracting arrangements.

The same provider also reported considering broadening its learning offer in order to recruit and retain increased numbers of learners. In survey, 41% of 'other' training providers reported increasing the number of qualifications they offered, whilst 48% had decreased the number of qualifications they offered. This suggests that the changes to the learning offers of other training providers are influenced by a range of factors beyond the 16-19 funding reforms.

Why changes were made

General Further Education colleges

General FE colleges most often reported making changes to their learning offer in order to satisfy the funding requirements of 16-19 Study Programmes and to accommodate concomitant changes in funding for post-19 learning. One college noted the interplay between the different reforms and acknowledged that as a 'programme' the reforms are very broad-ranging. The college recognised that the changes occurring in provision and administration were very varied but not altogether unexpected:

'There are all sorts of changes happening, obviously, both in terms of the way in which colleges are funded, but also in terms of what their core purpose is, how they deliver qualifications, how they prepare young people and adults for the world of work and for HE and so on. So, there's a significant change. I've been in the sector for twenty years and there has been change going on for twenty years. So, it's not a new and recent phenomenon.' (General FE College)

The per-learner funding model was felt by several colleges to allow greater flexibility in terms of curriculum design and teaching and learning methods, and this facilitated a number of changes. One college noted that *'if you still manage your college and manage staff time based on the number of hours that people teach, there's no incentive for members of staff to put more learning online'*. They thus encouraged tutors to widen their skills and engage in different methods of teaching and learning, including digital methods that engaged learners outside of traditional contact-hours.

Greater flexibility in funding was felt to facilitate positive changes in *'the way that we plan and deliver what we're doing'*, whilst the Study Programme approach was found by

several colleges to be highly adaptable to different vocational areas and departments. One college discussed how they approached the different departments by giving them the freedom to plan individual study programmes: *'we went out to the departments and said everyone is going to be on 540 hours on a programme of study, you bring back to us how you're going to achieve it'*.

Conversely, another college was more prescriptive regarding the implementation of Study Programmes in their provision, but nevertheless recognised and made use of the flexibility within each strand of the programme. This college felt that the increased requirements of the Study Programme were beneficial in focusing and structuring their learning offer:

'We were quite prescriptive about it, although, there was obviously, some flexibilities, but being really clear about component parts of that study programme [...] the head of RMIS there, he was very good in outlining exactly how it all fit together, and therefore, as we went into our curriculum planning, we were really quite prescriptive about what should be delivered, what can be delivered, what can't.' (General FE College)

Finally, another key factor in encouraging FE colleges to make changes has been increased competition for learners. This is related not only to the funding streams available for 16-19 provision but also to the introduction of GCSE maths and English for learners with a grade D. Colleges are finding that they have to compete for learners who will allow them to draw down funding in the most cost-effective manner. One college notes that *'competition has got to the point of being really intense because of demography, because the number of sixteen year olds is dipping now'*. As a result, this college has partnered with colleges in other parts of the country in order to share best practice and support the implementation of the reforms.

Increased competition for 16-19 year-old learners also motivated one college to review its additional services. The college felt that Information Advice and Guidance was particularly lacking in schools and so it invested in improving its own IAG services. The same college also concentrated its provision by narrowing its A-Level offer and creating clear pathways to Level 3, FE and HE study. In order to increase retention and maximise funding, the college also employed Personal Learning Coaches to support learners on an individual basis.

The college that reported a decline in 16-18 year-olds registering noted that this may be influenced by a number of factors, including: the relatively sparse population density in their geographical area, migration out of the area and, increased competition for candidates from both training providers and employers. Although the number of 16-18 year-olds applying to the college has decreased, the college has found it necessary to increase their provision for this age group as *'this is where the funding is'*. At the same

time, the college reports that decreases in Adult Skills Budget funding have also contributed to the reduced availability of courses for post-19 learners.

Private training providers

A number of private training providers made changes in order to comply with the requirements of 16-19 Study Programmes funding. A training provider offering apprenticeships for the engineering industry began offering a wider range of academic qualifications, including BTEC and GCSE courses, to satisfy the 'substantial qualification' and maths and English requirements of funding. In this way, they report having to '*manoeuvre to become a little bit more college-like*' in order to successfully draw down funding. A second training provider also noted a shift in their provision towards more academic-style delivery, including introducing set enrolment and completion dates that matched the academic year. This was done in order to ensure that learners who were enrolled on GCSE programmes were able to study and sit exams within an appropriate time period.

Changes were also made by providers in recognition of the potential challenges to fulfilling all requirements of Study Programme funding. One private training provider identified an opportunity to broaden the scope of their business by offering support, advice, and guidance to local organisations that were looking at delivering vocational-based Study Programmes for the first time. The training provider offered consultancy and teaching support to local business and schools to help them to prepare and deliver successful training. The provider stated that they are currently....

'Looking at another school now where we'll actually be going in and helping them with their potential growth programme. So not only will they use their programme and facilities to keep the kids in school, but also when those kids have left, they'll bring them back and offer them an Apprenticeship as a place to be trained [...] So instead of going to FE for a day, they'll go back to the school for the day.' (Private Provider)

These partnerships take into consideration the increase in the age of participation and aim to provide school leavers with more options for further training outside of more traditional routes. This change also helped the training provider to generate a secondary revenue stream that allowed them to complement their existing learning offer without incurring large additional costs.

Changes in recruitment and business planning were made by some private training providers in response to the perceived need to manage costs. One large provider offering apprenticeships, Traineeships and Study Programmes – alongside Adult Skills Budget - funded work-based learning – reports that the funding reforms have posed a challenge in terms of business planning. With particular reference to funding for trailblazers, the provider reports that:

'I have a fixed cost-base that doesn't go away in terms of staffing [...] So, our ability to business plan on the back of trailblazers when you don't know how much you're going to be charging [and] you don't know when the money's going to flow through is increasingly compromised.' (Private Provider)

This is echoed by a smaller training provider who reports being cautious in its recruitment in order to control costs. They report that they *'could probably take another 25% of learners on but they don't think the learners would be successful'* and the provider is concerned that they would not be able to draw down funding for these learners. By potentially under-recruiting, the provider hopes to offset any risk associated with the revised funding conditions.

One small provider that offered training specifically aimed at 16-18 year-old learners not in education, employment or training (NEET) was concerned about the switch from Entry to Employment funding to Foundation Learning funding. This provider felt that Foundation Learning funding reduced flexibility for learners and subsequently affected the viability of their programmes. A further provider noted that the move away from Entry to Employment funding facilitated a move towards courses with set enrolment and completion dates. This in turn brought *'a whole new set of challenges and issues, because we're now delivering more on an academic year basis whereas we were much more roll-on, roll-off, which is, you know, very much how we need to work with our employers'*. This provider was concerned that they were losing some of the flexibility required to be responsive to the needs of the employers they work with.

Finally, changes were also made in response to changes in the type of learner registering for training. One provider reported experiencing a decrease in older learners registering for training, particularly those over the age of 24. In turn, this resulted in their post-19 learning offer being narrowed. This allowed the provider to concentrate its provision on 16-19 training. The provider attributed this to falling post-19 registrations and greater availability of funding for 16-19 year-old learners. They also felt, however, that 24+ Advanced Learning Loans influenced older learners' decisions about whether to enter training. They were particularly concerned that older learners undertaking workplace learning may be discouraged by having to take out a loan. They report that:

'It's got to be the learner who then takes out the loan, yes, the learner is saying, 'Why should I be taking out the loan to improve my skills for that company?' (Private Provider)

'Other' training providers

One 'other' training provider reported experiencing a decrease in the number of post-19 learners enrolling on their courses. They had 36 learners registered in the 2013/14

academic year and that figure had decreased to 8 in 2014/15. This decrease was perceived to be *'because we can't draw funding down'*. According to this provider, 16-19 Study Programmes require learners to be registered on 'substantial provision' of more than twelve hours a week. If a learner is enrolled with a full-time provider offering a Study Programme, that full-time provider receives the per-learner funding. If the learner wishes to undertake additional study outside of the Study Programme, any part-time provider they register with will be unable to claim funding for that course. However, this training provider notes that provision of over 12-hours a week may not always include all courses that the learner needs or wants. For example, the interviewee reports that when Study Programmes were first implemented....

'Although my understanding of the 16-18 reform and the RPA agenda was that providers all had to be offering GCSEs if they were enrolling full-time 16-18 learners ... that was not the case across the board.' ('Other' Provider)

As a result, this training provider reported enrolling 16-19 learners on GCSE programmes but being unable to draw down funding for them because the per-learner allocation had already been granted to the full-time provider delivering the Study Programme.

Young learners are thus restricted as to where they can register, and how they can ensure funding for their studies. At the same time, training providers are also limited with regard to what they are able to offer to these learners without creating a funding deficit. This was of particular concern for one 'other' training provider, as they felt a strong social and moral responsibility to be able to offer learning to people aged 16-19 even in the absence of available funding.

The provider reported earlier which had outsourced all of its provision did so for a number of reasons. Firstly, it narrowed its learning offer to match the key growth areas of the Local Authority. Secondly, it acknowledged that the requirements of 16-19 funding now included maths and English provision and it felt unable to provide this, particularly at GCSE level. As a result, it sought a local FE College to which to subcontract its provision as it believed they would be best placed to meet the requirements of funding.

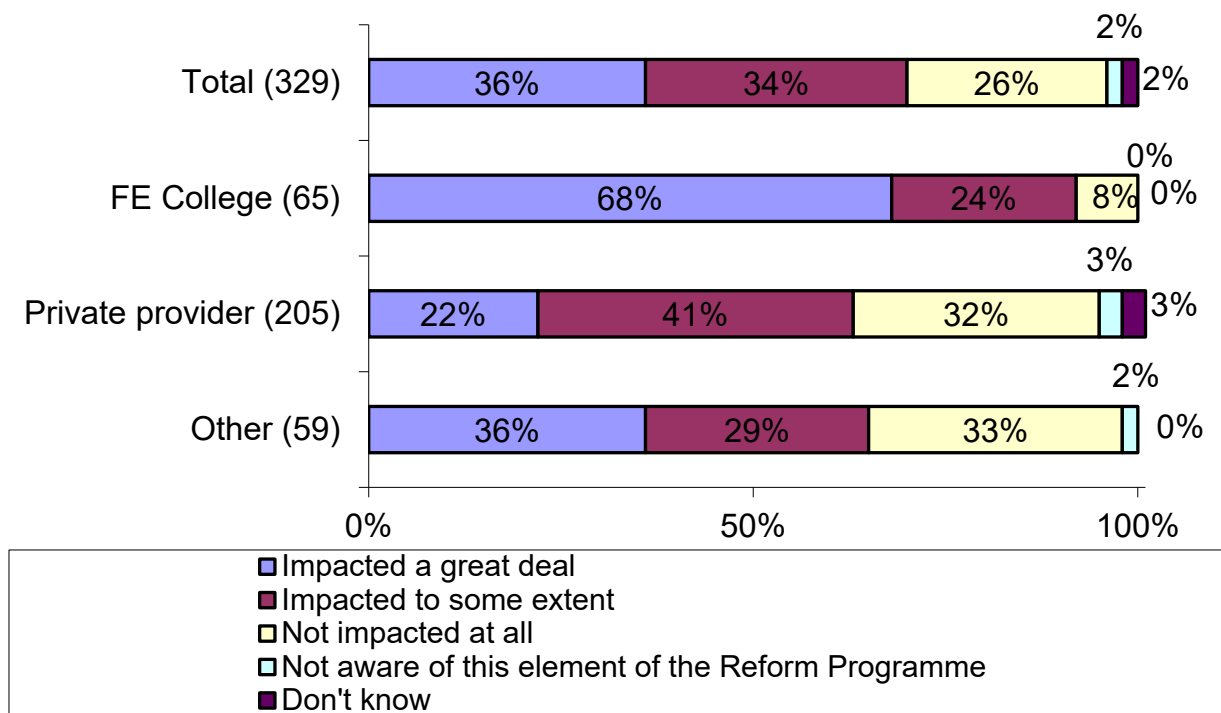
Perceived impact of the changes

Overall, views were fairly mixed in terms of providers' perceptions of the impact of the reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision on their organisation. In survey (see **Figure 41**) just over a third each felt that the changes had impacted a great deal (36%) or impacted to some extent (34%) on their organisation, whilst just over a quarter (26%) felt that they had not impacted at all.

FE colleges were the most likely to feel the funding reforms had impacted a great deal on their organisation (68%), whilst private providers were more likely to say they had

impacted to some extent (41%). 'Other' providers had more mixed views with 36% saying they had impacted a great deal and 29% to some extent on their organisation.

Figure 42: Extent to which reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_2, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

General Further Education colleges

As a result of the implementation of Study Programmes and the per-learner funding model some colleges have had to undertake significant restructuring of their learning offer in order to successfully draw down the available funding. A number of colleges have broadened the range of their 'substantial qualifications' to include apprenticeships, BTEC and A-Levels. Several colleges have focused provision on the maths and English component of Study Programmes by broadening their GCSE and/or Functional Skills provision. Several also report an increased focus upon work experience and the applicability of taught skills to the world of work. The latter has been particularly challenging for larger colleges, with one posing the question: *'I've got 5,500 sixteen to eighteen year olds. How can I get them all on work experience?'*

A number of colleges felt that Study Programmes and their related funding reforms introduced a *'much clearer focus around an agenda on relatively short interventions to get people into work'*. This was met positively by some colleges that reported greater coherence and efficiency in the design and delivery of their 16-19 provision. On a practical level, however, the shift in focus towards work-related training and simultaneous reductions in the Adult Skills Budget were noted to lead to *'some tough decisions about*

departments' with a number of colleges making redundancies and stopping some programmes of study. One college reported having to make 17 redundancies in relation to the restructuring of their provision. These were concentrated on staff *'who were working on programmes that were very successful at getting adults into jobs in the local economy'*. Another, small college felt that there was a *'reduction in general FE funding'* that was affecting their provision but they could not say to what extent this was directly influenced by the 16-19 funding reforms in particular.

A number of colleges reported increases in the number of 16-19 year-old learners enrolling and decreases in the number of post-19 learners. One college attributed this change to a combination of raising the participation age and simultaneous reductions in post-19 Adult Skills Budget funding. However, the same provider also acknowledged that the 24+ Advanced Learning Loan had also contributed to the decline in older learners taking up provision. They state that due to ASB reductions, *'our fees have had to be increased significantly'* for post-19 learners. They report that many of these learners are reluctant to take out a loan 'debt' to fund their learning and as a result they have *'never replaced through loans the number of learners we've lost'*. As a result of these complex interactions, it was often difficult for interviewees to pinpoint precisely the changes that arose as a direct result of the 16-19 funding reforms.

Another college also noted that changes to 16-19 funding are being impacted by simultaneous changes to post-19 funding. The college felt that there was a 'gap' in funding between the ages of 19 and 24, which has meant that learners of those ages have fewer funded courses available to them. The college states that it currently offers....

'Access courses and then just any other Level 3 courses that we can attract students 24 plus onto. Yes, it creates a weird-, so there are some programmes at vocational Level 3 that you can come onto if you're aged 16 to 19, then you're not allowed onto them if you're aged 19 to 24, then you are allowed onto them again if you're 24 plus.' (General FE College)

Two colleges discussed the wider implications of the 16-19 funding reforms in terms of effects they have witnessed at other colleges. One college noted that the impact of the changes to funding streams appeared to vary greatly depending on the type of programmes that the college originally offered:

'The shape of my college is pretty good really, because it is spread. I visit a lot of colleges in other parts of the country where they are predominantly level one and two sixteen to eighteen, a lot of adults, quite a bit of subcontracting, maybe not big enough in apprenticeships. That seems to me a very difficult place to be, and a lot of FE colleges are in that place.' (General FE College)

It is perceived that changes in funding streams have been particularly challenging, especially for those institutions that had a large post-19 target population and perhaps were not offering large numbers of apprenticeships or Study Programmes. These changes have been made more challenging by wider financial restructuring and budget reductions. One college reports adopting an increased focus upon income streams and budgets and they found particular challenges in....

'Making sure that, in terms of our financial management, we don't become dependent, for that core delivery, on variable external sources of income, like ESF, or even commercial income.' (General FE College)

In order to manage this risk, the college reported reconsidering whether vacancies that arose needed to be filled or whether the role could be dispersed and the responsibilities taken up by existing staff. Furthermore, the college believes that such financial pressures will continue as they state that, *'we haven't gone bust, yet, but it gets increasingly difficult every year'*.

As a result of these complexities, a further college reports adopting the wider implications of the 16-19 reforms selectively, or only as far as is feasible, in order to lessen the immediate impact. As such, although most colleges expressed agreement with the principles of broadening the 16-19 curriculum, there were some reservations regarding the wider long-term effects of the reforms.

In addition to expanding or refocusing their learning offer, a number of colleges have made significant changes to staffing. One smaller college reported having to increase its administrative staff in order to cope with the funding structures. At the same time they also report *'losing tutorial hours for students because of the study programme'* and having to make *'three rounds of redundancies in six years'*. A larger college reported similar challenges and states that, ideally, they would have liked to *'change the profile of the staff'* at the college as they do not have enough *'trainer assessors or support staff to be able to be more flexible in the delivery of the curriculum'*. As a result, they have fostered a change in culture among staff to persuade them to come on board with the changes that needed to happen in order to support the 16-19 reforms.

The above changes are reflected in several colleges noting that their learning offer has become more focused on 16-19 year-olds. One smaller college noted that the majority of their provision now centres upon making sure 16-19 year-olds have the skills required for employment and the college feels that other teaching and training is viewed as *'less important'*. The college claims that as a result of the 16-19 reforms they do not prioritise adult skills nor do they prioritise continuing workplace development. Their provision is increasingly focused on school leavers only. A second college planned to further increase 16-19 provision as it is felt that there was more funding available for these learners than for other demographic groups.

Where post-19 learning has not been considerably scaled back it has become increasingly employer-led. This is attributed by several colleges to the greater coherence around Study Programmes and their requirements. One college reported shortening post-19 courses and delivering more courses in partnership with external agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus. They also report a decrease in the number of ESOL classes as these were lengthy and they wished to move to more cost-effective models of delivery. Two colleges reported general reductions in their post-19 provision that they attributed to the greater focus on 16-19 Study Programmes.

As a result of the simultaneous shifts towards the coherence of the Study Programmes on the one hand, and increasingly employer-led post-19 learning on the other, the reforms have affected individual colleges to varying degrees. Of the apparent disparity between colleges, one interviewee states that....

'It had to do with the shape you had to start with, and if you were more fortunate your risk was spread across a range of areas and balanced. If you were predominantly getting a lot of nineteen plus funding and a lot of your work was level one and two where it is harder to implement some of the reforms, it is really difficult.' (General FE College)

Whilst colleges whose provision was already moving towards 16-19 Study Programmes and GCSE provision do not seem to be greatly affected, other, mostly urban, colleges have seen a lot of change. Whilst many interviewees expected some of these changes it was the scale that surprised one: *'the scale of the funding cuts this year or in the redundancies has genuinely shocked me, and I'm also shocked by the number of colleges whose debts are eye-watering'*. Changes in funding have been particularly difficult for colleges with a large adult learner population.

As a result of the economic changes associated with the FE reform programme, a number of interviewees noted that acquisitions and mergers within the sector are becoming more frequent. One interviewee believes that this will continue and result in large-scale restructuring of the sector:

'I think it is almost inevitable that we are going to move closer to the Scottish and Welsh models, that there will be far fewer colleges and they will be much larger with different delivery points. They will be given less money and have to run more efficiently.' (General FE College)

One interviewee responded to the significant changes in funding by improving the way in which funding and programme implementation was understood throughout the organisation in order to maximise buy-in from staff:

'We worked really hard to get that triangulation right and get people to understand more clearly about both the funding, [and] the maximisation of that study programme to be as efficient and effective as possible.' (General FE College)

However, other colleges, although broadly supportive of the Study Programme and the principles behind its introduction, believe that the funding issue has not been handled well:

'To ring fence five to sixteen and at the same time say that the staying on range will go to eighteen but we'll keep cutting the funding is nonsensical to me. The most draconian cuts to adult learning, particularly recently, of my lifetime really. So the focus of the funding cuts being so much on such a narrow area has led to quite a strong sense, I think in the sector, of unfairness or being picked on.' (General FE College)

In this view, the funding reforms interact with other policy reforms to create a sense of inequality between different learning offers within the Further Education sector. What happens as a result of this was observed by another college, who stated that *'we have quite a lot of unemployed nineteen, twenty-year-olds who'd love to study with us but they can't'*.

Private training providers

Changes made by private training providers have resulted in significant changes in the shape and purpose of some organisations. A number have introduced a broader range of qualifications to satisfy the funding requirements. Two report becoming more academically-led and switching from rolling courses to set enrolment and completion dates. One provider reported enhancing its relationships with local business and schools in order to offer support to these partners as they begin to deliver Study Programmes. This provider has effectively widened its business from providing training to offering consultancy services and vocational training to other providers.

Despite many providers implementing changes in response to the FE reform programme, there remains some uncertainty regarding the long-term viability of the 16-19 funding reforms, particularly in relation to financial forecasting and responsiveness to employers. One provider reports particular challenges associated with trailblazer funding, pointing out that....

'I have a fixed cost-base that doesn't go away in terms of staffing. So, our ability to business plan on the back of trailblazers when you don't know how much you're going to be charging and you don't know when the money's going to flow through is increasingly compromised.' (Private Provider)

A further provider reports that their *'biggest issue is the difference in approach to funding between the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency'*. From a business model point a view, EFA funding is designed on a lag system that is subject to affordability. According to the provider, this scheme was adopted under that assumption but also under the premise that the first payment would arrive fairly early on in the training process. The provider goes on to say that:

'As an organisation, the first £12,000, we forfeit that because they don't pay it to us. It is a high risk strategy because obviously I've got that expenditure, not knowing if I'm going to get the income, but in terms of responding to local needs, I can't be responsive if I haven't got the money, and I can't be responsive if I only think I might get the money.' (Private Provider)

As a result, the funding streams available to private training providers can limit the adaptability and flexibility of those providers in response to the needs of the local economy. A further provider states that the turn towards more academic courses, with set enrolment and completion dates, similarly compromises the ability to be responsive to the needs of employers. This was felt particularly strongly by one provider that works with young learners not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Entry to Employment funding was perceived by this provider to be more flexible and appropriate to the needs of this demographic than Foundation Learning funding. This was echoed by another provider who claims that Foundation Learning funding *'cut down a lot of flexibility and the funding changed from weekly payments for them being on programme to qualification-driven programmes'*. This impacted negatively on the demographic groups that this provider targeted and severely impacted on the viability of the programme.

A further provider discussed what they perceive to be the differences between further education and compulsory education funding, highlighting that if training providers do not ensure learners achieve in maths and English they lose a 20% achievement bonus. The provider states that schools do not lose funding for learners that leave without achieving Level 2 after five years yet further education providers are penalised for non-achievement after one or two years. This situation is seen as unfair to training providers, who feel as if they are being penalised for factors they consider to be non-essential to many of the courses they deliver.

As a result of the perceived inequalities in funding streams, one training provider envisaged a reduction in the numbers of 19+ learners entering further education or training outside of traditional FE colleges. At the moment, the provider notes that their Adult Skills Budget allocation is used for classroom based return-to-work activities that are not necessarily an educational priority. They feel that this, together with the increased requirements for GCSE maths and English, may result in the provider being *'in a position where we won't be able to accept some people'* because adequate funding will not be accessible.

‘Other’ training providers

The major change that ‘other’ training providers have experienced is a reduction in the number of 16-19 year olds entering their provision. One training provider predicted that this trend will continue as the 16-18 demographic increasingly opt to attend sixth forms and colleges that can offer them all aspects of the Study Programme. Noting the reductions in Education Funding Agency contracting, the provider predicts that *‘somewhere down the line there won’t be any EFA contracting for part-time sixteen to eighteen year olds’*.

The main reason for the reduction in 16-19 year-olds is considered to be the reforms to funding for this demographic group. The change to per-learner funding has, in the opinion of the provider, led to increased competition for learners. In some cases, providers are being selectively competitive in recruiting the learners that will help them to maximise their funding opportunities. This is similar to the selective recruitment reported by private training providers whereby only learners who can reasonably achieve all the funding requirements are being recruited. This leaves smaller providers, and those having to outsource certain components of Study Programme provision (such as GCSE maths and English), in a difficult position as they are unable to actively compete for learners. One training provider recognised this as a mismatch between the aims of the 16-19 reforms and the practical application of the funding stream.

The difficulties obtaining funding for 16-19 provision are particularly evident for small and part-time training providers. With the increase in the participation age, and the requirements for more substantial provision – that includes maths and English, work experience, and personal development and employability skills – part-time training providers cannot provide the full range of training to their learners. This is perceived to be due to both a lack of time and a lack of funds. Private training providers have noted that the funding reforms around 16-19 provision operate on a lag system that involves an investment cost by the provider that takes time to be recovered as the learner progresses. As a result, one ‘other’ training provider stated that they were unable to *‘deliver to the volume or the allocation given to them for those sixteen to eighteen year olds’*. Due to this and other changes in Adult Skills Budget funding, some providers find themselves in a difficult situation in which they *‘could be in a position where they are delivering activity totally free because they have, still, a social and moral responsibility towards ensuring that individuals have got the best skills and qualifications to enable them to move on wherever’*. This deficit in funding is an ongoing concern for some ‘other’ training providers.

The training provider that moved to a 100% subcontracting model for their provision did so in order to become more employability-focused. They wished to concentrate their learning offer on *‘progression, economy and skills’* in order to match the local authority agenda. They outsourced their provision to a large FE College which was felt to be in a good position to provide the required learning. However, the training provider has been

dissatisfied with the performance of the subcontractor in terms of learner recruitment, retention, and progression. The training provider notes that work experience requirements are a significant pressure as there is a shortage of larger employers who are able to take multiple learners for work placements. The training provider also reported wanting to reconsider the subcontractor but being limited by the additional requirements of 16-19 funding. For example, the provider expressed concerns about finding a different subcontractor that would be able to deliver the maths and English component of the study programmes. As a result, the provider feels 'trapped' in the contract they currently have and they are considering broadening their learning offer in order to lessen the risk of learners not qualifying for funding.

7. Simplification of the funding system

Summary of key points

The government's simplification of the FE funding system has led to the following changes in FE provision which are in line with the government's aspirations for its policy reforms:

- Publicly-funded courses are increasingly more likely to have work-related outcomes, improve English and maths skills, and to be targeted at young adults;
- Systems are being developed within institutions to meet customers' increased purchasing power e.g. staff are being employed and resources deployed to manage 24+ Advanced Loans and the move to employer control over funding;
- More action is being taken to make provision as efficient as possible – reducing unnecessary costs where possible whilst maintaining the quality of teaching and learning and seeking ways to increase revenue outside of government funding.

There have been a number of unanticipated consequences of policy reform identified by respondents who report:

- The quality of the teaching and learning could be at risk from continued government reductions in funding and increasing focus on financial efficiencies;
- The funding landscape is not as simple as originally intended – providers are needing to invest additional time and resources into managing 24+ loans and employer financial contributions;
- The challenge for FE providers of implementing numerous funding changes and increasing their own financial responsibility within a context of funding cuts is taking its toll on staff morale.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

The changes to the skills funding system implemented as part of the FE Reform programme have led to four key changes in provision. These are:

- What and who is being taught
- Investing in managing customers – both learners and employers
- Seeking greater efficiencies in delivery costs
- Identifying alternative sources of funding.

What and who is being taught

At a time of fiscal constraint, the FE Reform Programme has sought to ensure that government investment in skills adds value and maximises impact. To this end, skills funding would focus on strengthening the labour market and filling the gaps where individuals and employers under-invest.³⁴ The government intended public investment on learning to be made available for those seeking work, those who need English and maths skills and young adults.

Depth interviews with providers suggest that there has been a significant refocusing of teaching provision in line with the government's approach and the availability of public funding to achieve it. Firstly, all types of providers have increased their provision of apprenticeships. This trend reflects the government's increasing focus on, and investment in, this form of training which it believes will provide the necessary skills to grow the UK's businesses:

'As a result of the funding changes we are more focused on Apprenticeships now... So it's apprenticeships, apprenticeships, apprenticeships.' (Private Provider)

Secondly, in parallel with the increase in apprenticeship provision, many providers indicated in the interviews that there has been a decrease in the number of short courses³⁵ and in the teaching of subjects which are not directly linked to labour market outcomes. Interviewees suggested that there was a lack of public funding available now for the teaching of softer skills and more generalist courses:

'We've stopped doing things that, obviously, were no longer funded, so were clearly not considered to be of key importance anymore... what you'd perceived as leisure-type things.' (General FE College)

Thirdly, there has been a significant move over the last few years towards teaching English and maths to learners to ensure they work towards and attain a good GCSE. This follows the government's commitment to fund literacy and numeracy teaching as it perceives such skills to be necessary for the benefit of the economy but unlikely to be funded by learners or employers themselves:

'The funding conditionality means that we don't get any funding for any learner programme, unless they're enrolled on English and maths.' (General FE College)

The changes to the type of skills provision which the government funds has resulted in related shifts in the profile of learners being taught by FE providers. With a ring-fenced apprenticeship budget, targeted funding at school leavers who have not attained a good basic level of English and maths, and a reduction in the Adult Skills Budget, the age

³⁴ BIS (2013), *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*, BIS

³⁵ There has been a slight increase in the median duration of aims since 2009/10

profile of FE learners is getting younger. For example, the ILR analysis shows that the median age of learners at FE Colleges has decreased from 27 in 2009/10 to 24 in 2013/14.

'The cuts to the Adult Skills Budget has, however, meant that the college focuses more time and resources on 16-18 year olds as this is where there is more money to access.' (General FE College)

It is therefore clear that FE skills and learning provision has altered under the FE Reform programme. The change in the focus of what the sector is teaching learners is in line with the government's policy intentions. Providers are now targeting public funding on increasing work-related skills, improving English and maths ability, and focusing on young adults.

Investment in managing customers – both learners and employers

A key part of the FE funding reforms is to present users, both learners and employers, with greater control over how and where skills funding is spent. The government objective is to ensure that FE provision is tailored to customers' needs. 24+ loans and co-investment initiatives such as EOP and apprenticeship Trailblazer Standards have been introduced to increase the purchasing power of learners and employers respectively.

Several participants in depth interviews highlighted how they have had to invest significant time and resources to alter their provision in order to meet the needs of their customers. For example, providers have had to develop and invest in infrastructure to manage the promotion and repayment of 24+ loans. The necessary additional investment is exemplified by the following provider:

'We've taken on more people to support the 24+ loan, so we've had to take on more staff just to manage that process.' (General FE College)

It is not only in meeting the needs of learners, but of employers as well, that providers are planning to make additional investment. With government policy seeking to encourage employers to invest directly in the skills provision they need, some FE institutions expressed concern about their capacity to deal with employers directly. A number of interviewees identified additional administrative tasks, such as raising regular invoices, as well as relationship management time, for which they will need to plan and finance.

Depth interview findings thus suggest that providers are taking steps to ensure their institutions are ready to provide a responsive service to learners and employers who are purchasing the learning products they seek from them directly. This change in approach, driven by the government's simplification of funding reforms means providers are less dependent on funding from government for centrally-planned programmes.

Greater efficiencies in delivery costs

The government's reduction in FE funding for Adult Skills Budget provision has led to the overwhelming majority of providers making a number of changes in order to reduce their overheads. In the quantitative survey, providers were asked which strategies, from a list, they had adopted to reduce overheads in response to reductions in budget in recent years (see **Figure 42**). Overall, about nine in ten said they had increased efficiencies in working practices (91%), whilst eight in ten had reduced spending in non-essential areas (79%). Just under two-thirds (64%) had reduced the overall number of full-time equivalent staff, and more than four in ten had reduced subcontracting where this does not achieve efficiencies (44%). A quarter said they had increased subcontracting where this achieves efficiencies (25%).

FE Colleges were more likely than other types of provider to have increased efficiencies in working practices (98%), to have reduced spending in non-essential areas (94%) and to have reduced the overall number of full time equivalent staff (85%). 'Other' providers were more likely to have reduced spending in non-essential areas (78%) and reduced the overall number of full-time equivalent staff (78%) than private providers.

Figure 43: Strategies adopted to reduce overheads in response to reductions in budget in recent years

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Increased efficiencies in working practices	91%	98%	90%	88%
Reduced spending in non-essential areas	79%	94%	71%	85%
Reduced overall number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff	64%	85%	50%	78%
Reduced subcontracting where this does not achieve efficiencies	44%	62%	39%	35%
Increased subcontracting where this achieves efficiencies	25%	29%	23%	26%
More investment in online services/IT new technology	9%	6%	11%	9%
Consolidation/rationalisation of premises	5%	10%	2%	6%
Increase in commercial work/activities	1%	0%	1%	0%
Utilities/energy /fuel costs	1%	0%	1%	1%
Other	3%	5%	2%	1%
None of the above	6%	2%	7%	4%
Don't know	1%	0%	0%	4%
Increased efficiencies in working practices	91%	98%	90%	88%

Q4C, all respondents, bases shown in table

The findings of depth interviews echo the quantitative results in that the FE and skills sector is adapting to the simplified funding system by reducing overheads. Providers of all types have made a variety of changes to their provision to reduce costs. Three principal ways in which providers have sought to minimise their outgoings were identified. The first is internal efficiency savings. Many providers have sought to reduce their spending on staff, accommodation, and supplies. For example:

‘As funding has decreased...we’ve had to make cut backs so, we actually moved to a smaller premises, we did down-size as well, so we had to make cut backs with staff. Also, we’ve obviously looked at other ways we can manage efficiency savings, such as continuously looking for cheaper stationery or supplies or whatever we procure.’ (Private Provider)

A second approach, adopted by some providers, is to review the way in which they deliver services. For many this means increasing the number of courses and material which is available online in order to streamline services and reduce their costs. One general FE college reported that they had chosen to reduce the amount of work they offered to subcontractors in order to reduce their overheads. A negative consequence of this, as identified by the provider, was that the specialisms of the courses provided by such subcontractors would be lost and that, as businesses in the community, the local economy was being impacted by the decision not to employ their services.

Finally, it appears that a small number of general FE colleges are considering ways in which changes to their organisational structures could produce efficiency savings. Potential options being discussed to minimise costs across providers were on a spectrum ranging from informal partnerships sharing some services, then more formalised federated arrangements, to actual mergers. The reduction in funding resulting from the government’s simplification of funding system could have significant future impact on the ‘landscape’ of the FE sector.

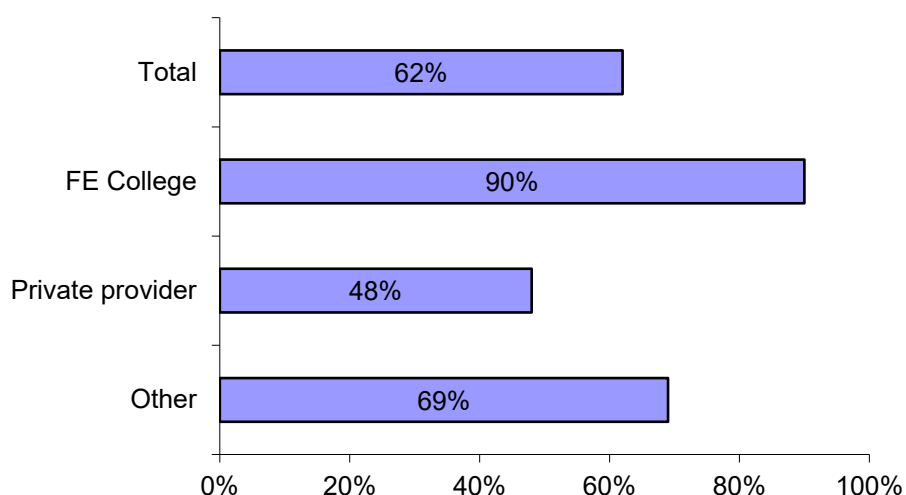
Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the simplification in funding systems introduced as part of the FE Reform programme has led the majority of providers to reflect on, and make changes to, their working practices to ensure they are more efficient. The question for providers and government will be the extent to which efficiencies can continue to be made whilst still ensuring the provision of high quality teaching and learning in the FE sector.

Identifying alternative sources of funding

A final change that some interviewees are implementing, in response to the simplification of the funding system, is attempting to source investment through alternative means in order to counter the impact of reduced funding directly from government.

Quantitative survey findings (see **Figure 43**) suggest that more than six in ten providers have made changes to their pricing structures in response to reductions in budgets in recent years, rising to 90% of FE Colleges. This figure also rose among larger organisations – 94% of those with more than 5,000 learners and 75% of those with 2,000 to 5,000 learners.

Figure 44: Whether providers have made changes to their pricing structures in response to reductions in budgets in recent years



Q4A, all respondents, base=329

The survey also shows (**Figure 44**) that the ways in which providers had adjusted their pricing structures centred on their increasing prices/fees, with more than half (53%) saying this. About a quarter (24%) had introduced/increased employer contributions and one in ten had reviewed/ reduced pricing structures (10%) or reduced/lowered prices/fees (9%).

Figure 45: The ways in which providers have adjusted their pricing structures

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	197	58	97	42
Increased prices/fees	53%	69%	34%	70%
Introduced/increased employer contribution	24%	15%	37%	9%
Review/reduce pricing structures inc more for less	10%	12%	8%	10%
Reduced/lowered prices/fees	9%	10%	12%	2%
Reduce/restructure staff levels/ reduce staff income	3%	0%	4%	4%
Having competitive rates	2%	1%	3%	0%
Decreased/reduced employer contribution	1%	2%	1%	0%
Other	9%	8%	7%	15%
Don't know	1%	0%	2%	0%

Q4B, where providers have made changes to their pricing structures, bases shown in table

There were few significant differences by provider type on this matter, apart from 'other' providers and FE Colleges being more likely to mention increased prices/fees (70% and 69% respectively, compared with 34% of private providers) and private providers being more likely to mention introducing or increasing employer contributions (37% compared with 15% of FE Colleges and 9% of 'other' providers).

Only a very small number of providers in the depth interviews explicitly stated that they had made changes to their pricing structures. However, of those who did refer to this change it was in terms of raising fees which reflects the quantitative survey findings. The reason for increasing the fees for certain courses is that whilst government subsidies have reduced, the cost of delivering them is the same, if not higher, due to inflation:

'We have increased our fees...that is directly to do with the fact that, for many of our courses, each one of our learners is attracting less funding than they did in previous years. Those courses do not cost less money to deliver than they did two years ago. In fact, they cost more, so we are needing to ask our students for a higher contribution. ('Other' Provider)

In the face of reduced government funding, as indicated particularly by survey findings, providers are seeking sources of income, from learners primarily, followed by employers, to finance their provision. This move away from government funding provision to consumers investing in the training they seek is in line with the government's aspirations for its simplification of the funding system in FE. The longer term impact of these changes on learner take-up and employer investment in training is, however, yet to be seen.

Why changes were made

It is evident from the findings reported earlier in this chapter that in many cases providers have changed the types of courses they teach and the learner profile they target to maximise the government funding available for them to access. For example:

- More apprenticeship courses are being offered as public to deliver them has increased
- English and maths is being taught as part of 16-19 year olds' full time study programmes as it is a conditionality of funding if the learner has not already achieved a GCSE C grade
- The average age of learners is reducing as funding for post-24 year olds is now in the form of loans to the learner and not direct to the provider.

As reported in the previous section, however, the reduction in the Adult Skills Budget has led providers to make a number of different choices about how they reduce their overheads and/or increase their income. Overall, it appears that providers have decided to make changes to their costs in ways which achieve efficiency savings but maintain the quality of their teaching and learning as far as possible:

'It makes us focus on every element of what we do that's not directly for students. So all of our back-office functions ...everything else is looked at to be as streamlined and as lean as we possibly can.' (General FE College)

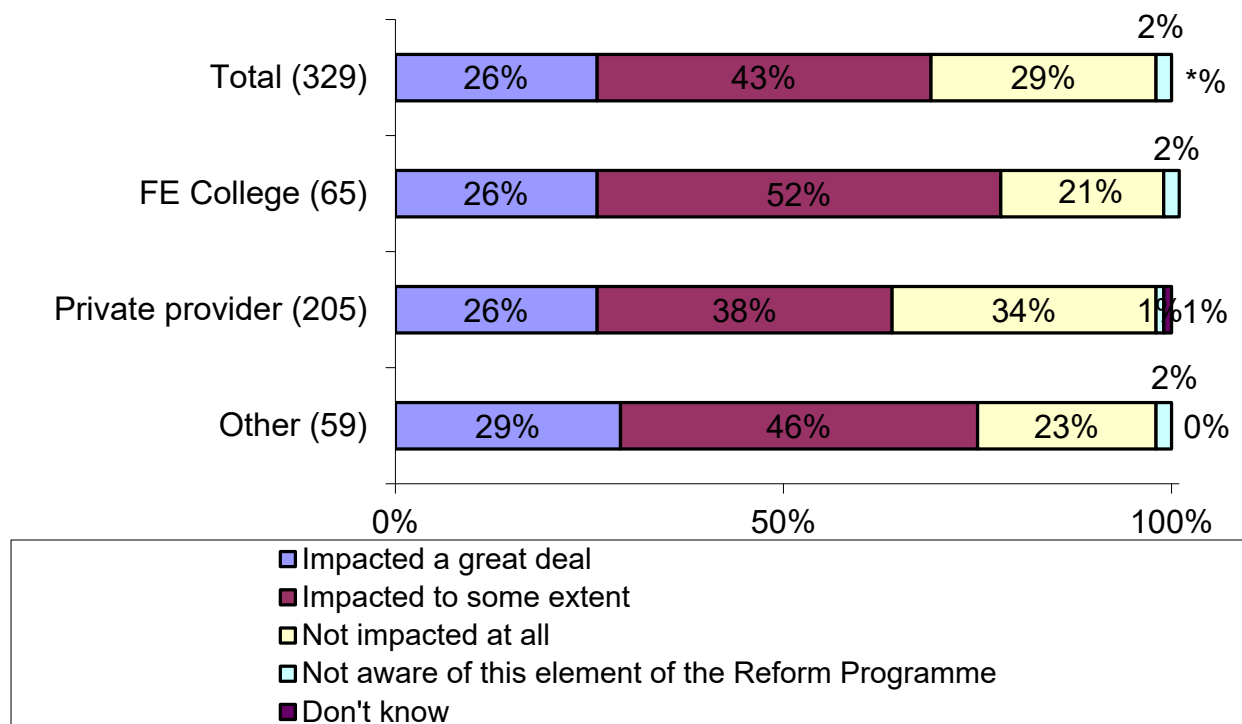
Perceived impact of the changes

The simplification of the FE funding system and the strategies implemented as part of this have resulted in some organisations within the sector making changes to their provision. These changes have had far reaching impacts on the FE and skills sector some of which have been positive, whilst others have been negative.

Overall, more than four in ten providers (43%) responding to the quantitative survey said (**Figure 45**) that simplification of the funding system had impacted to some extent on their organisation, whilst about a quarter (26%) felt it had impacted a great deal on their organisation. Three in ten (29%) felt it had no impact.

There were no significant differences between types of provider apart from private providers being more likely to say that it had not impacted at all on their organisation (34% compared with 23% of 'other' providers and 21% of FE Colleges).

Figure 46: Extent to which simplification of the funding system has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_8, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

The principal impacts identified in the qualitative interview findings are:

- Changing the quality of provision
- Narrowing of what and who is taught
- Complicating the funding picture.

Changing the quality of provision

A variety of views were offered in the depth interviews as to the impact of changes to FE funding on the quality of skills provision. A few providers believe that changes to skills funding have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. There is sense that a more competitive funding environment increases the focus on what is being provided and this in turn leads to greater emphasis on its quality:

'It's had the impact of absolutely making our curriculum planning really rigorous, every year, to make sure that anything that we're running is high quality, it's efficient, it's going to get good class sizes.' (General FE College)

Many more interviewees however, believe that a greater emphasis on funding detracts from the amount of time which is dedicated to discussing and improving the quality of the learning experience. They put forward the view that, if providers are focusing on the changes to FE funding methods and on the ways in which they need to create efficiencies in order to address the challenges of reduced government funding, their ability to concentrate on the quality of teaching and learning may be hindered:

'If you're talking about money, which more and more colleges are doing, you're not talking about teaching and learning in the same way.' (General FE College)

Narrowing of what and who is taught

As noted in the first section of this chapter, the changes to the types of training which the government prioritises influence the nature of learning opportunities available in FE. Several providers suggest that they have had to stop offering some courses because they are no longer financially viable in a challenging funding environment. The government's focus on funding apprenticeships and English and maths skills means that providers are struggling to finance other courses such as vocational training or foreign languages. This has resulted in a view that the breadth of FE learning opportunities has significantly reduced:

'We're just going to be stopping doing those and we are going to be stopping delivering counselling courses, foreign language courses, British sign language courses. These are all courses where there's a lot of intense management support needed and we just don't think it's a good use of funding. So the programme offer is going to be reduced.' ('Other' Provider)

The reduction in the range of courses on offer in FE following the simplification of the funding system is coupled with a narrowing in the profile of learners. The type of programmes funded by government has had an impact on the balance of young and adult learners at many FE institutions. Many providers commented on the reduction in the proportion of older adults (which is evident in the ILR data analysis). This is an intended impact of the FE Reform programme to focus public funding on adults under 24 years of age and ask those who are older to fund themselves through the loans system:

'Biggest volume of work is with young people and we also have a very large apprenticeship programme and clearly over the last few years, a declining number of adults.' (General FE College)

Complicating the funding picture

According to quantitative survey findings, over one third (35%) of FE providers felt that the simplification of the funding system had had a negative impact on their ability to respond to the FE Reform programme. Very few participants in the qualitative research considered the changes to skills funding which formed part of the FE Reform programme

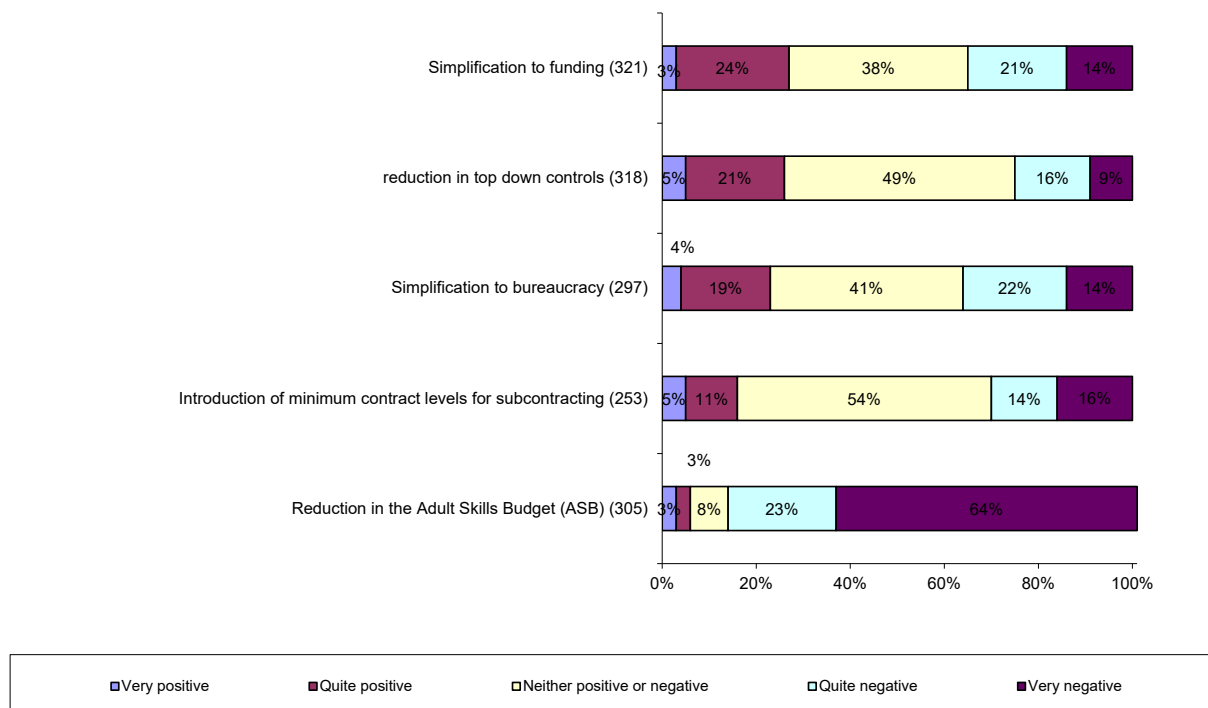
to be a simplification of the previous system. For many providers, even those who welcome the change in approach, the changes have actually created a more confusing system. In addition to managing funding streams from the SFA and EFA, FE providers now need to administer 24+ loans for their adult learners and are responsible for handling employers' financial contributions to training.

Further, the challenges for providers to respond to the funding changes proposed by the FE Reform programme have been made even more difficult to implement by general reductions in budgets. In order to manage the loans for adult students and work closely with employers to develop training tailored to their needs, providers may require additional personnel and resources. However, at the same time that the policy reforms have been introduced, the ASB has been reducing:

'Too many reforms to implement effectively, made more difficult by budget cuts and not an increase in resources.' (General FE College)

Quantitative survey findings (**Figure 46**) support these findings from the depth interviews that funding cuts have made it particularly challenging for providers to respond to the FE Reform programme. Most FE providers (87%) think that the reduction in the ASB has had a negative impact (with 64% saying very negative). FE colleges were significantly more negative in their views of the reduction in the ASB than private providers (93% very/quite negative, compared with 82%).

Figure 47: Extent to which specific policy changes have had a positive or negative impact on providers' ability to respond to reforms



Q9, all respondents (valid responses only), bases shown in brackets

Overall, whilst the funding reforms have aimed to reduce inefficiencies in the FE sector and increase its competitiveness, their frequency and the resources required to implement them have taken their toll on providers. Even for those providers who have been able to effectively react to the funding changes, they have been so numerous and challenging that morale in the sector is worryingly low:

‘Just getting cut all the time, it’s depressing. I think I’ve had three rounds of redundancies in six years. Trying to keep quality up and enthusiasm up in those circumstances is testing.’ (General FE College)

8. Freeing providers from central government control

Summary of key points

In general, providers are less aware of the FE reform to free providers from central government control than of many of the other policy changes introduced in the last five years. Providers have made a number of changes to their provision which is in line with the spirit of the reform but not necessarily driven directly by it. For example:

- Greater investment in providers' own management information systems as they take on greater responsibility for the auditing of new funding streams e.g. 24+ loans and/or employer contributions and improve their monitoring of wider outcomes for government funded courses;
- Development of FE courses and training to meet the needs of local communities – for example by supporting the learning and skills strategies of LEPs and by addressing skills gaps identified by employers. The Innovation Code has played an important role in enabling some providers to tailor provision to meet local skills needs.

The perceived impacts of the changes to provision which are linked to the aim of freeing providers from central government control raises a number of issues:

- The financial efficiency of devolving responsibilities for monitoring performance and funding streams to the local level is challenging when providers need to invest more resources in ensuring the systems and processes are in place for robust management
- The reward of high quality teaching and learning provision with the minimising of centrally-led performance management is challenging for providers to achieve when their attempts to improve are set in a context of frequent policy reform and financial constraint
- The freedom of providers to personalise curricula to the needs of learners is limited when government funding is targeted at particular objectives relating to learning aims – for example improving English and maths and delivering specific types of qualifications, such as GCSEs
- Other organisational strategies supported by government, such as LEPs' learning and skills strategies, encourage the alignment of FE provision to meet locally-determined rather than centrally-driven needs but do not necessarily guarantee it – for example, where LEPs and providers are unwilling or unable to work together to achieve common objectives.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

Depth interview findings indicate two ways in which FE provision has altered in response to government's ambition to free providers from central government control. These are:

- Investing in management information systems
- Aligning curriculums to local area needs.

However, the number of interview participants who directly referred to making changes as a result of this policy was limited.

Investing in management information systems

Part of the government's aim to free providers from central government control was to reduce central government's performance monitoring of FE provision. This change in approach has led a small number of providers, of different types, to invest resources in their management systems to improve their ability to monitor their own information. The changes providers had made to increase their monitoring capacity appear to be related to other reforms government introduced to the FE funding system.

Firstly, the government's encouragement for providers to diversify their funding streams in addition to public funding (for example through the administration of 24+ Advanced Adult Loans and/or employer financial contributions) has led to several providers implementing their own systems to monitor these processes. Secondly, the government's focus on the learning outcomes of students funded by government grants (for example 16-19 year olds on study programmes) has required providers to monitor their learner success and progress rates more accurately. Several providers noted that they had needed to increase the capacity of their management information teams to meet this requirement effectively.

It is therefore apparent, as identified in a limited number of depth interviews, that the administrative burden of performance monitoring has not necessarily been reduced but that responsibility for it has passed from central government to FE providers themselves.

Aligning and designing curriculums to local area needs

In return for the greater freedoms and flexibilities proposed in the FE Reform programme, the government wants providers to meet the training needs of their local communities. In line with this vision, depth interview findings suggest many providers are seeking to identify and address the needs of learners and employers in their local communities. Leaders are actively looking to improve the development of their local economies by providing skills training which meets the needs of both learners and employers. Whilst there is a general recognition amongst providers that the government emphasises this

approach there is little evidence that they link it directly to a policy reform to free them from central government control:

'We do work more closely with employers, we are very focussed on the local economy, and growth and productivity. We are trying to adapt our curriculum, so that we're doing things that are going to make sure that young people have got a good outcome, we're not just doing it for the sake of doing it.' (General FE College)

One of the ways in which providers are adapting provision to ensure their curricula address the needs of their local area is by working closely with their LEP. A small number of providers, ranging in type, identified different ways in which they have tried to align their offer to meet the learning and skills needs of their communities as outlined by LEPs. These include: simply being informed about the learning and skills strategies of the LEP; having local businesses sitting on their own boards; being represented on the LEPs –in some cases, with principals and managing directors sitting on the LEPs' learning and skills boards themselves.

Many providers are expanding or developing new FE provision to meet local needs and address skills training gaps. The government encouraged this approach through its reform freeing providers from central control. However, there is little recognition from providers that this policy has driven the changes they have made. Several providers, in particular in London and East of England, reported they had increased their provision of ESOL courses to address the growing number of students presenting to them whose first language is not English. One of these providers suggested that they had broadened the scope of these courses to include elements of IT, maths and basic administration to provide learners with a wider range of skills to better prepare them for their next steps into education or employment.

There are also a handful of examples of colleges and private providers, working with employers to develop sector-based academies and courses. These have been set up to provide learners with the necessary skills and experience to be strong candidates for local employment opportunities. These providers identified the government's introduction of the Innovation Code as critical to their freedom to design courses which meet the specific needs of employers and learners. The Innovation Code has enabled providers to group together a number of units from different qualifications which have not previously been combined. By doing this, providers can develop courses for employers which are tailored to particular skills gaps which employers perceive and provide learners with the necessary skills for these employers to recruit them into their vacancies:

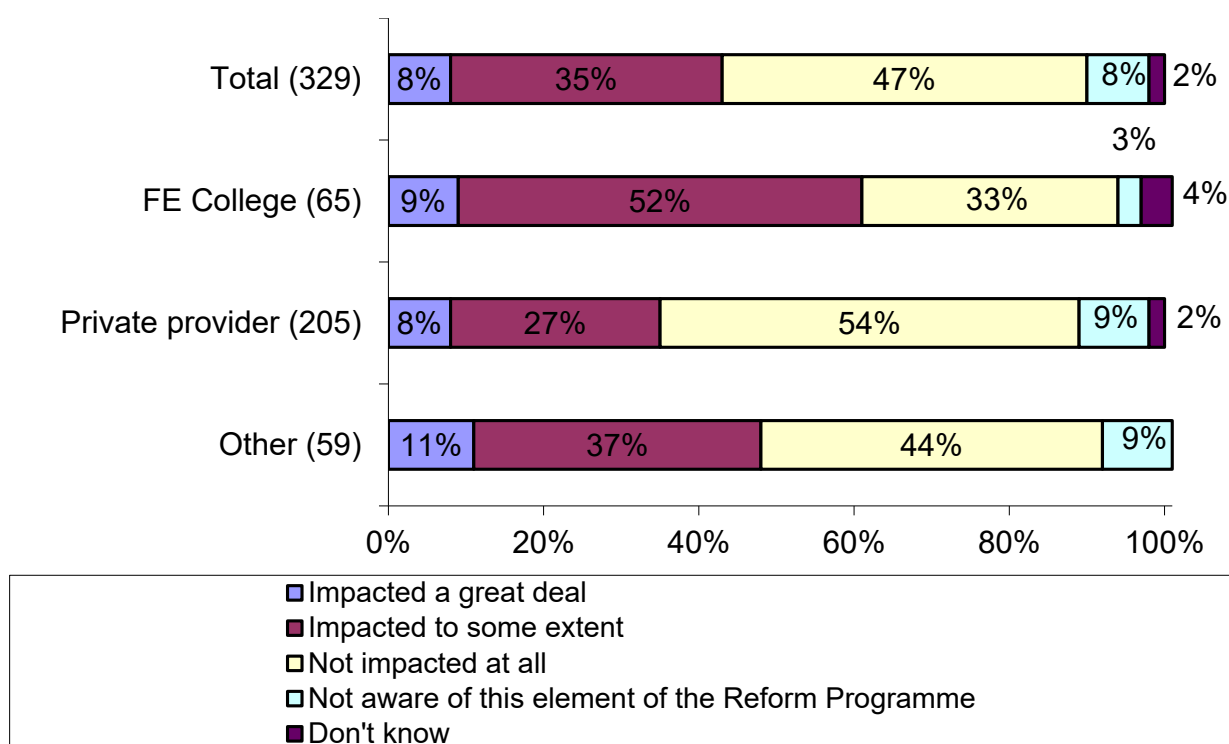
'One of the positive parts of the whole programme was the development of the Innovative Funding stream [i.e. Innovation Code], so we could actually just create courses out of it, just to suit the kind of employers and learners that we had, or their needs.' (General FE College)

Perceived impact of the changes

Echoing the low number of qualitative findings about *directly* attributable changes to provision as a result of freeing from central government, quantitative survey findings (**Figure 47**) suggest that the impact of this reform was not significant for the majority of providers. One in twelve (8%) were not aware of this element of the Reform programme. Nearly half (47%) said it has not impacted on their organisation at all. The latter proportion was significantly higher amongst private providers than amongst FE colleges (54%, compared with 33%).

Only two-fifths of FE providers (43%) reported at least some impact, of which a minority (8% of all) reported that it has impacted on their organisation a great deal. FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to report that it has impacted to some extent (52%, compared with 27%), while the proportions of FE colleges and private providers reporting a great deal of impact were similar (9% and 8% respectively).

Figure 48: Extent to which freeing providers from central government control has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_5, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

In addition to being asked about the impact of being freed from government control, surveyed providers were also asked about whether the reduction in top-down controls and/or the simplification to bureaucracy have had a positive or negative impact on their ability to respond to reforms. More than a quarter of FE providers (26% very/quite positive) thought that reduction in top-down controls have had a positive impact whilst a similar proportion (25% very/quite negative) thought they had had a negative impact.

Private providers were significantly less likely than FE colleges and 'other' providers to be positive about the extent to which they thought a reduction in top-down controls has had an impact (18% of private providers were very/quite positive compared with 36% of FE colleges and 37% of 'other' providers). They were, however, significantly more likely than FE colleges and 'other' providers to be neutral in their views on the impact of this policy change (55%, compared with 46% and 37% respectively). This view may result from private providers having been less controlled by government in the first place.

Just over a fifth of providers (23%) were positive about the impact of simplifying bureaucracy. However, these are outweighed by more than a third (36%) which considers the policy change to have a negative impact on their ability to respond to reforms. There were no significant differences by provider type with regard to the impact of this policy changes.

Qualitative depth interviews indicated that a number of impacts relating to the freeing from government control had been experienced, but, in each case, only by a limited number of FE providers. These are discussed below.

Many government controls still exist and investment at the local level is required to effectively meet them.

The FE Reform programme aimed to have a less intrusive approach to oversight of the FE sector. To this end, *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* set out plans for how Ofsted and the SFA would adopt "*a more proportionate and risk-based approach to monitoring*".³⁶ There are two interlinked intentions of minimising government-led quality systems. Firstly, to allow providers delivering high quality provision to concentrate on responding to the needs of learners and employers, rather than on unnecessary administrative burdens. Secondly, to enable government to focus on intervening in, and improving, provision which is of poor quality.

Depth interview findings indicate that some providers have witnessed a reduction in government monitoring. For example, those judged 'outstanding' in their teaching and learning outcomes by Ofsted are not inspected unless their performance declines. This specific change and other relaxations in government monitoring, such as the cessation of the requirement for providers to submit their self-assessments to the SFA, have been welcomed by some strongly performing providers. For example:

'I think we have had some reduction in the bureaucracy which is good...we've had an increase in the time between Ofsted inspections and, for example, we've seen

³⁶ BIS (2013), *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*, BIS

that there's been a relaxation on some of the monitoring systems we've had to have in place.' (Private Provider)

However, some institutions in the sector still perceive there to be too much government control, particularly compared with other education providers:

'The amount of data that we're still expected to collect, and the intricate rules that we're supposed to abide by, when you compare that with what the schools have to do, there's just absolutely no comparison.' (General FE College)

In freeing providers from government control, the FE Reforms programme aimed to make providers more responsible for their own auditing. This has enabled central government to devolve monitoring responsibilities to the local level and thereby increase efficiencies within the sector's central funding body. The number of SFA staff was reduced by 44% between 2010/11 and 2014/15.³⁷ This devolution of responsibilities, however, has resulted in providers having to invest more time and resources in monitoring systems:

'We've taken on more responsibility, I suppose, of things that Government Office colleagues in the Skills Funding Agency would do previously. So that's had an impact. We've had to build extra things into our system for managing funds, extra safeguards, because now there's no safety net.' (Private Provider)

Challenge for providers to continually improve within a difficult environment

Whilst the FE Reform programme aimed to free providers from central government control it also expected providers to improve their standards. In order to raise the standards of teaching and learning, Ofsted's new Inspection Framework changed the previous 'satisfactory' grade to 'requires improvement'. The desire to improve standards has been welcomed by FE providers as a valid objective. However, the government's emphasis on the need for providers to continually improve teaching and learning standards has led some providers to question the sustainability of this approach, particularly in a climate of reduced funding and the frequent introduction of new policies. It was reported as challenging for providers to improve their standard of delivery when having to simultaneously implement policy reforms. This is made more difficult when there is a lack of resources to implement the required changes effectively. There is a sense amongst many providers that currently they have to deliver much more for significantly less funding:

'There's obviously a drive to improve. For example, every year the student performance levels, the minimum levels of performance, rise, so we're expected to deliver higher and higher levels but with the other changes and the other

³⁷ SFA (2011), Skills Funding Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 and (2015) Skills Funding Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2014-2015, SFA – average number of staff employed

expectations on us and with a static level of funding, or in some cases, considerable decreases, it does make it very difficult.’ (Private Provider)

Freedom to meet the needs of learners as long as key policies followed

In *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* the government sought to establish a skills system that meets the needs of the individual learner by not promoting one form of learning journey over another.³⁸ Such an open approach to developing skills training was welcomed by one provider as it enables them to design courses which are tailored to the needs of their learners:

‘The removal of top-down Government targets is fantastic. It just gives you so much freedom and flexibility to plan your curriculum and your provision and your service much more responsibly.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

However, the focus within the FE Reform programme on key aspects of teaching and learning within the context of reduced government funding has resulted in providers not being as free as perhaps originally anticipated to tailor the curriculums they deliver. Providers noted that they had greater freedom in principle to develop personalised learning journeys for students. However, this scope is limited by the funding available. Since government funding is committed to the improvement in the quality and accessibility of apprenticeships and the English and maths skills of learners, the development of individual curricula by providers is dependent on their identification of alternative funding streams:

‘The freedoms that we had were soon eroded, because we had a reducing budget which had to be targeted at apprenticeships and English and maths.’ (General FE College)

Whilst providers support and agree with the necessity to improve the English and maths skills of learners, many dispute the appropriateness of the GCSE qualification for learners. The reasons for disquiet amongst a wide range of providers can be summarised as follows:

- the motivation of school leavers to continue to follow a course they have previously failed and the impact of this on the opportunity to engage these students in other learning opportunities;
- the time commitment required of students to acquire this qualification in addition to other courses they are studying;

³⁸ BIS (2013), *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*, BIS

- the ability of providers to teach a course effectively in less time than schools have already had the opportunity to do;
- the appropriateness of the course content for real life work experience;
- a lack of demand from employers for future employees to have achieved this level
- the inflexibility of the assessment windows in terms of retakes or employment commitments.

One provider noted:

'The real big mess-up is the idea that kids who got grade Ds have to do a GCSE. It's the biggest line of madness I've ever seen in my life...If kids have spent four years failing at something, what's the point in doing the same thing again? We'd want a curriculum that'd help them develop, rather than a curriculum that stops them from developing...I respect the concentration on English and maths because I think that is what's holding our young people back but I don't respect the way it's been done because it's the wrong qualification.' (General FE College)

There is consensus amongst several providers that the needs of learners who have not achieved a good GCSE in English and/or maths at the point they enter FE would be better served by a Functional Skills rather than a GCSE qualification. Essentially, provider responses suggest that an FE sector freed from the control of government would be more likely to teach the former than the latter.

Ensuring accountability to local need

FE providers are clear about the government's ambition for them to assess and respond to the training and skills needs of their local communities. Many providers appreciate that their provision needs to add value to the economy by equipping learners with the training and experience they need to perform the jobs available in the local area:

'The onus is now on us as a service provider to find out ourselves using relevant information and networks and organisations, what their needs are across the city.' ('Other' Provider)

The government has established systems within its Local Enterprise Partnerships for employers and local communities to articulate their FE needs. It has given LEPs a strategic role in identifying the skills gaps in their local communities which need to be tackled to support the growth of business and the wider area. Further, to encourage FE colleges to take account of LEPs' priorities, the government proposed that

representatives of each should sit on the others' boards.³⁹ However, in practice some colleges have struggled to gain representation on, and engagement with, LEP boards. The challenges faced have included:

- existing representation of other FE providers on the LEP's learning and skills board resulted in reluctance that another provider should be represented;
- competing time pressures for a specialist provider and their LEP meant the two parties had been unable to engage with each other effectively;
- conflicting learning and skills strategies from multiple LEPs in an area served by a general provider led to confusion as to the best way to address local needs.

Such issues had made accountability to, and the tailoring of curricula for, local areas more challenging.

³⁹ HM Treasury (2012), Autumn Statement 2012, HM Treasury

9. Removing restrictions to enable new ways of working with other organisations

Key findings

Partnerships with employers were increasingly seen as a key relationship to all provider types. In particular, most colleges had recently put more effort into working with employers, and had more and/or closer relationships as a result. Private providers were more likely to report they had been consistently working with employers for a long period although many noted they had increased their responsiveness in recent times. The most common ways in which providers reported that they worked with employers included arranging work experience/work placements, engaging through their senior leadership (including governors), networking, and working with employer advocates.

In addition, LEPs were reported as being increasingly important partners for providers.

The majority of providers believed increased partnership working had taken place directly as a result of the FE Reform Programme.

Providers reported that they were able to work in partnership before the Reform programme. However, the reforms facilitated their partnership working and gave them more incentive to work in partnership in order to increase their responsiveness to employers.

Perceived Impact

The extent to which removing restrictions to enable new ways of working with other organisations has impacted on providers varied. While a few providers recognised the policy change, it is notable that many providers did not recognise this as a distinctive element of the FE Reform programme, with many thinking increased partnership working was a result of other changes (e.g. changes to apprenticeships). As such, they did not think FE reform had much impact on them in this respect – this perspective was particularly frequent amongst private providers.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

Survey data shows that more than half of FE providers (57%) worked with other partners, such as LEPs and employers, to develop provision in their local area. These providers

were asked to rate the importance of the relationships they have with their partners in helping their organisation understand local needs.

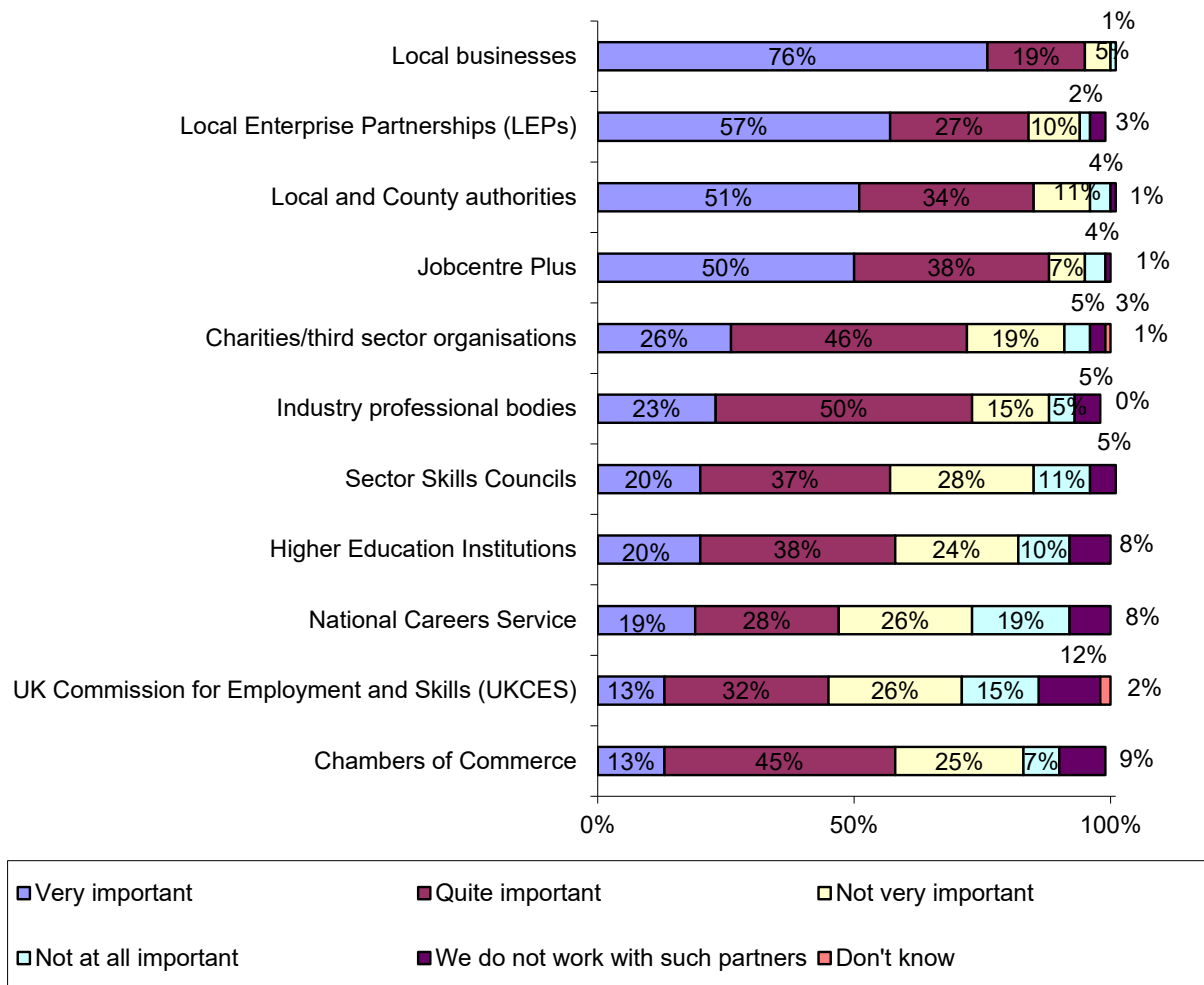
Relationships with local businesses were most frequently rated as important (see **Figure 48**), with 76% of FE providers (that worked with any partners) rating this as very important and a further 19% rating this as quite important. In total, 95% of FE providers (with any partners) rated relationships with local businesses as important.

Next most important was the relationship between providers and Jobcentre Plus (88% very/quite important), followed by local and county authorities (85%) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (84%). However, a higher proportion considered the relationship with LEPs than considered the relationship with Jobcentre Plus (50%) and local and county authorities (51%) as *very* important.

Around three-quarters of FE providers that have worked with other partners rated relationships with industry professional bodies (74%) and charities/third sector organisations (72%) as important in helping them understand local needs. Around three fifths rated relationships with chambers of commerce (59%), Higher Education Institutions (58%) and Sector Skills Councils (57%) as important. Around a third rated these bodies as unimportant (32%, 34% and 38% respectively).

Relationships with organisations with a national focus, including the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the National Careers Service were less frequently rated as important (45% and 46% rated them very/quite important respectively). One in eight FE providers (12%) said they had not worked with UKCES and one in twelve (8%) said they had not worked with the National Careers Service.

Figure 49: Rating of importance of relationship between providers and specific partners in helping the organisation's understanding of local need



Q3A, where work with other partners to develop what provision is offered in the local area, base=183

These findings are further supported by the in-depth interviews in which general FE colleges, private providers and 'other' providers all said that partnership working with employers was increasingly important. They said that it ensured that their provision remained responsive and relevant to the needs of the local and regional economy and, for some, assisted the continuation and growth of the provider's business.

A number of FE colleges had also worked with schools and academies. Some had expanded their work in this area considerably in recent years. Some colleges and providers also reported working in partnership with other colleges and providers to bid for large scale funds, to focus collaboratively on their respective specialisms, or to engage with employers in a particular sector. In some cases, partnership had also allowed sharing of good practice or pooling of resources.

Levels of engagement with LEPs and Chambers of Commerce appeared to have increased since the reforms, although some providers had found this difficult to achieve.

General Further Education colleges

In more detail, in depth interviews, general FE colleges reported a variety of modes of partnership working. All worked with employers in some way, usually with local businesses. Most colleges said that they had put more effort into working with employers recently, and that they had more and/or closer relationships as a result:

'We are helping employers to make their businesses more profitable, making sure they've got all their skills needs met. Although we've always had reasonable relationships with businesses, they've been much closer.'
(General FE College)

Several of the general FE colleges specifically mentioned working with LEPs to better tailor their offer to the needs of local employers. One had set up a partnership with a local hospital trust with the help of the LEP, to deliver some of their pre-nursing training and all of the apprenticeships needed by the trust:

'We recently invited the organisational development director of the local hospitals trust on to our board. Also, because of the LEP work around health, we've now got a health board set up, which is helping them to plug some of the gaps in their skills and we're going to be opening up a base within the hospital... Once you've actually got an employer that's got a bit of capacity and has got a large number of staff, you can work very tightly with them to be able to supplement what they've already got.' (General FE College)

Several colleges also reported partnership working with employer organisations, including Chambers of Commerce. Some had taken steps to strengthen employer representation on their management boards in order to become more responsive to employers' needs. Two examples were:

'Some of our priority areas are, for example, health and social care, the visitor economy. They're the LEP priority areas, and we've been project leading on one of the big ESF projects. We've done a lot of capacity building work, to try and get more young people to want to go into the care sector as well.' (General FE College)

'We've tried to strengthen our board, so we have certainly taken in account what BIS have been saying about changes to governance, to make sure that our board is effectively challenging us, and that we have a good representation from local employers on the board.' (General FE College)

Some of the colleges had set up partnership arrangements or networks with other colleges in their region. For example, one met regularly with other colleges in order to share best practice on teaching and learning, administration, and staff training. Some had

developed partnerships with local schools and academies. At least one of these arrangements was a substantial undertaking which had come about directly as a result of FE reform:

'We've founded an academy trust, so as a college we're now sponsoring failing schools. We're a teaching school... So all the new, opportunities for collaborative partnership working, we're really seizing on that.' (General FE College)

In the provider survey, FE colleges were significantly more likely than average to rate relationships as important with Jobcentre Plus (94% very/quite important), local and county authorities (91%), charities/third sector organisations (78%), UKCES (63%), industry professional bodies (87%), chambers of commerce (80%) and HE institutions (88%).

Private training providers

Most of the private training providers interviewed in depth reported that they worked closely with employers, and especially with local SMEs:

'The majority of our work is with small and medium businesses. We would like to think that, because of our place in the architecture, that is about helping to move those businesses forward in terms of business growth and individual growth for the employees within it. So, we get to hear a lot of what they want.' (Private Provider)

Working with employers had recently become a greater focus for many of the private providers. For example, one provider spoke of having stepped up its responsiveness to employers by moving from providing 'off the shelf' programmes to offering bespoke solutions for employers.

Some private providers also reported partnership working with other providers, including other private providers and colleges. One of these providers was part of a training consortium and also delivered as a subcontractor for a local college. Another was working in partnership with two colleges to engage with engineering supply chains, and a third was using the Innovation Fund and working with a university to form an employers' institute. Their intention was to create pre-employment hubs and deliver apprenticeships for the care sector. One provider now used Ofsted reports to identify schools where they could potentially sell their services both in respect of learners' education and also for staff training:

'We monitor all the schools in the area with Ofsted, so I'm able to look at this and say, 'Right, that is a school that needs some help. Let me knock on the door and see if we can help them out. That's the networking. That's

where we've changed. So we're trying to be one step ahead.' (Private Provider)

Some providers reported that LEP partnership working had recently increased, although in one case it had taken a lot of work to bring about:

'I've fought long and hard in terms of our local LEP, and actually I've managed to get their head of enterprise and skills onto our board.' (Private Provider)

A few private providers reported having worked more deeply with their Local Authorities. One provider said that they had tried to engage with their LEP but had not succeeded in establishing partnership working. Similarly, another had tried to work with SSCs but had not managed to form an effective partnership.

One provider highlighted that the current funding regime did not suit the way their employer partnerships worked in practice – they tended to work with a large number of employers, rather than a few large ones:

'They're not interested in 200 employers each with one learner but they're very interested in one with 200 and a lot of their rules are around that scenario. Our way of operating, which we have to do, is not that cost effective. It would be far more cost effective if we had 200 with one employer but that's not the way that it works.' (Private Provider)

Another private provider reported that their partnership working had decreased as a result of the Reform programme. They now worked with fewer businesses and schools than they had prior to the changes:

'We used to work with business in the community, we used to drive work with local schools. We no longer have the capacity to support this so that work has been reduced through the FE reform.' (Private Provider)

In survey, private providers attached greater importance than average to their relationships with Sector Skills Councils (65% very/quite important) and the National Careers Service (52% very/quite important).

'Other' providers

'Other' providers also reported a variety of partnership activities. Employer partnerships were important for them and some said that their activity had increased following the reforms. For others, the volume of employer partners had remained the same but they had revisited the way that they engaged with their employer networks. One provider had an employer-facing team, and they also made good use of the LEP. Three of the other providers reported partnership working with Local Authorities. For example, one was part

of an effective adult education network in their region. Another had become involved in Local Authority London-wide ESF bids to provide more structures and strategic ESOL provision across the region:

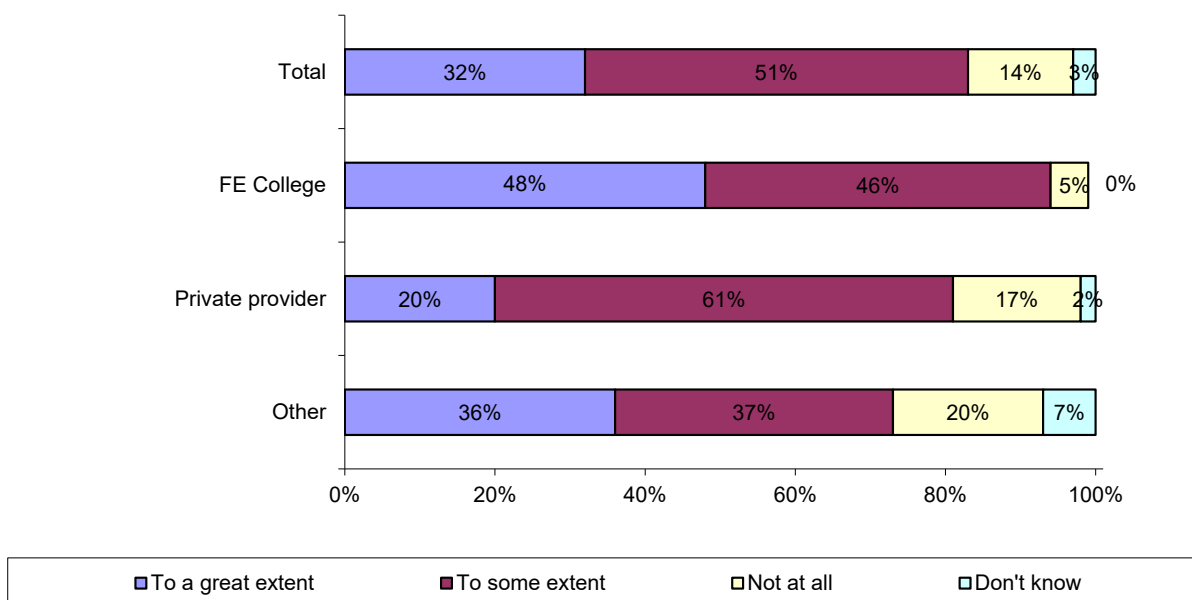
'We try to work within those partnerships through a whole range of projects. We apply for monies, we deliver services, we have open day activities, we do joint work with other Local Authorities.' ('Other' Provider)

Two providers mentioned partnership activity with Jobcentre Plus, and in one instance this had worked very well, with a provider putting on courses for over 50s jobseekers.

Relationships with LEPs

In survey, of the 94% of FE providers that have worked with partners that rated a relationship with LEPs as important, more than four-fifths (83%) thought that partnership working with the LEP had emerged as a result of the FE reforms (see **Figure 49**). This includes a third (32%) that thought this had been the case to a great extent. The proportion that reported a significant impact in this respect increased to 48% of FE colleges (compared with 20% of private providers). Just 5% of FE colleges did *not* agree that partnership working with the LEP had emerged as result of the FE reforms. This proportion was higher amongst private (17%) and 'other' (20%) providers:

Figure 50: Extent to which partnership working with LEPs is a result of the FE reforms



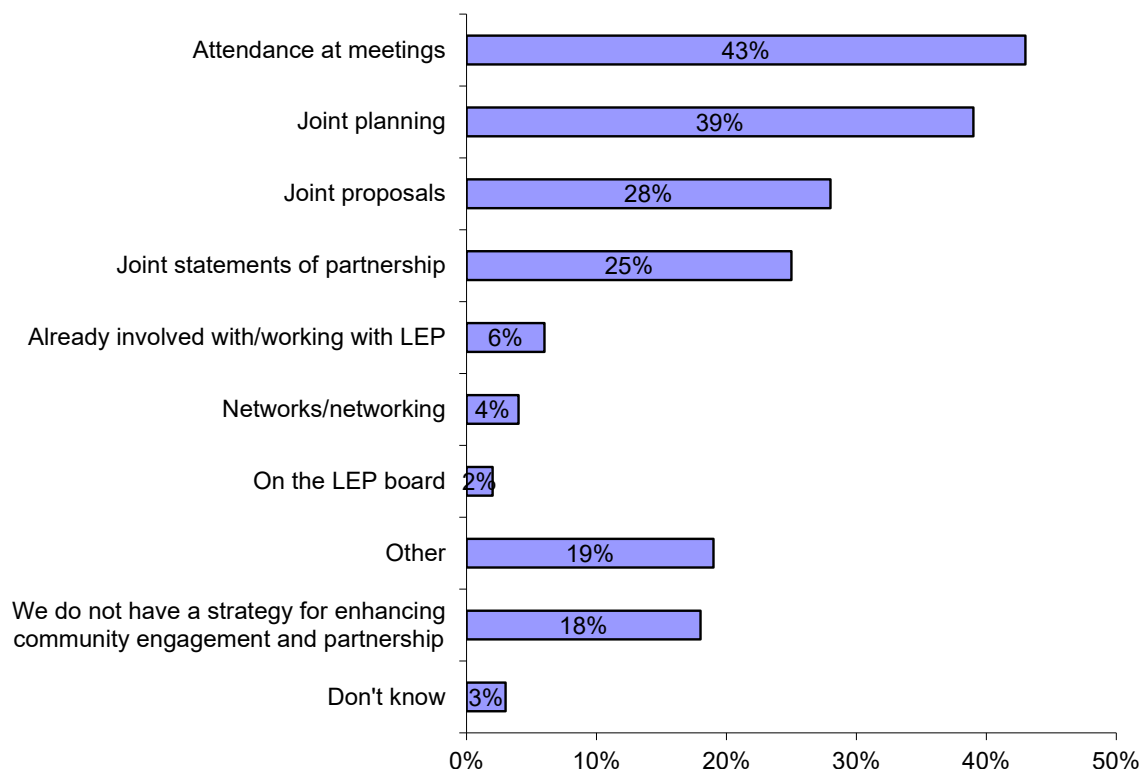
Q3B, where relationship with LEPs is important, base=173

All FE providers, regardless of whether or not they worked with partners, were asked what strategies, if any, they had for future enhancement of partnership working with LEPs or other partners.

Overall (see **Figure 50**), four-fifths of FE providers (79%) had a strategy for the future, with attendance at meetings being the most frequently mentioned strategy (43%) and joint planning (39%) next most frequently mentioned. Around a quarter mentioned joint proposals (28%) and joint statements of partnership (25%).

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to have such strategies – 92% of FE colleges cited at least one, compared with 71% of private providers. They were significantly more likely than private providers to mention meetings (55%, compared with 40%); joint planning (55%, compared with 31%); joint proposals (42%, compared with 22%) and joint statements of partnership (35%, compared with 19%).

Figure 51: Strategies for the future for enhancing partnership working with LEPs etc



Q3C, all respondents, base=329

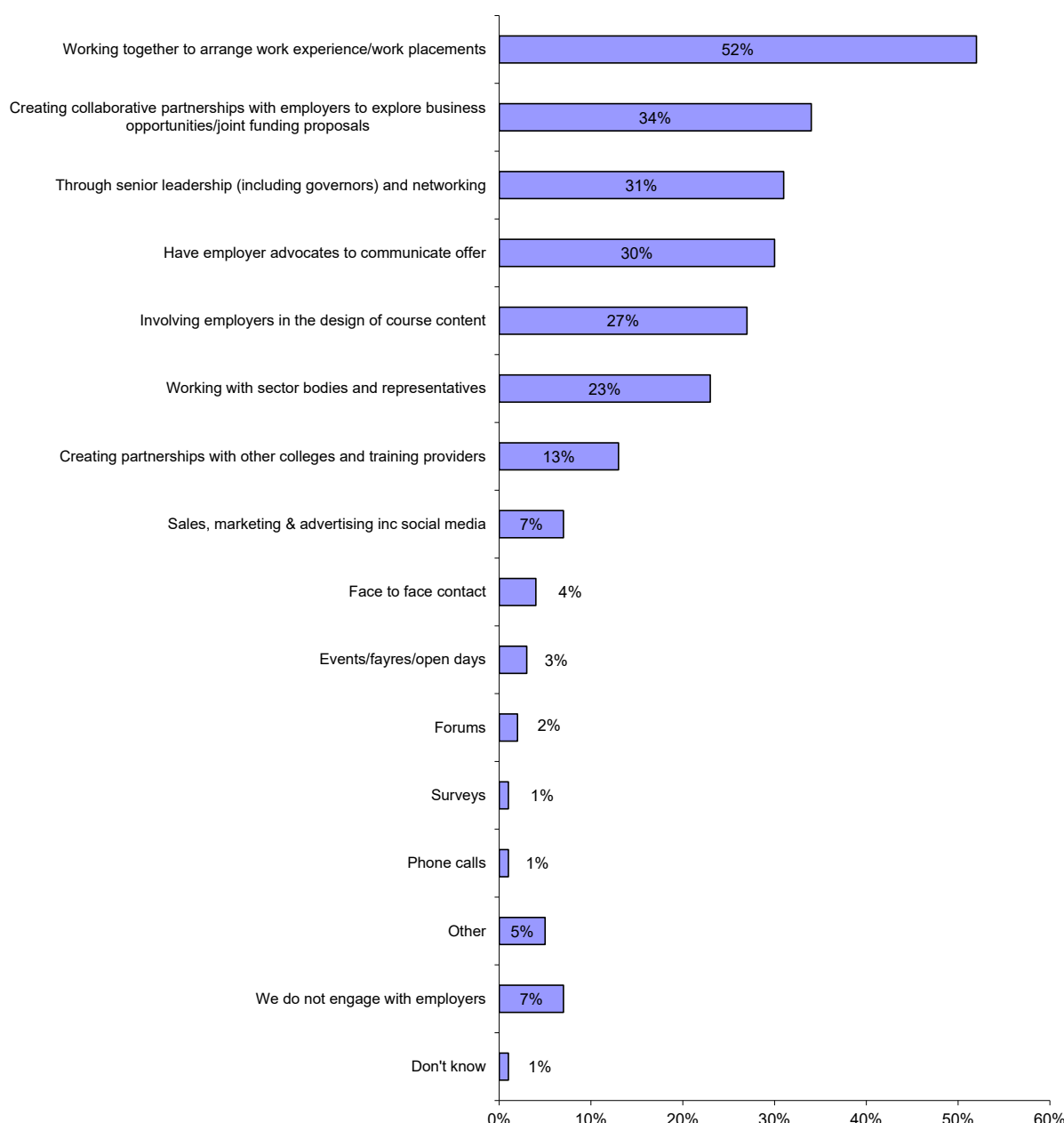
All FE providers were asked about ways in which they actually engaged with employers. Most engaged in some way (7% did not – mainly private providers; 1% were not sure).

More than half (52%) reported working with employers to arrange work experience/work placements, while around a third (34%) created collaborative partnerships with employers to explore business opportunities/joint funding proposals (see **Figure 51**). Others engaged through senior leadership (including governors) and networking (31%) and/or by having employer advocates to communicate offers (30%).

Around a quarter (27%) reported involving employers in the design of course content and/or working with sector bodies and representatives (23%). Far fewer mentioned creating partnerships with other colleges and training providers (13%); sales, marketing and advertising (including social media) (7%); face-to-face contact (4%); events/fairs/open days (3%); forums (2%); surveys (1%); and/or phone calls (1%).

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to report engaging with employers through: senior leadership and networking (43% of FE colleges, compared with 26% of private providers); involving employers in the design of course content (42%, compared with 22%); working with sector bodies and representatives (38%, compared with 14%); and creating partnerships with other colleges and training providers (21%, compared with 9%).

Figure 52: Activities undertaken to engage with employers



Q3D, all respondents, base=329

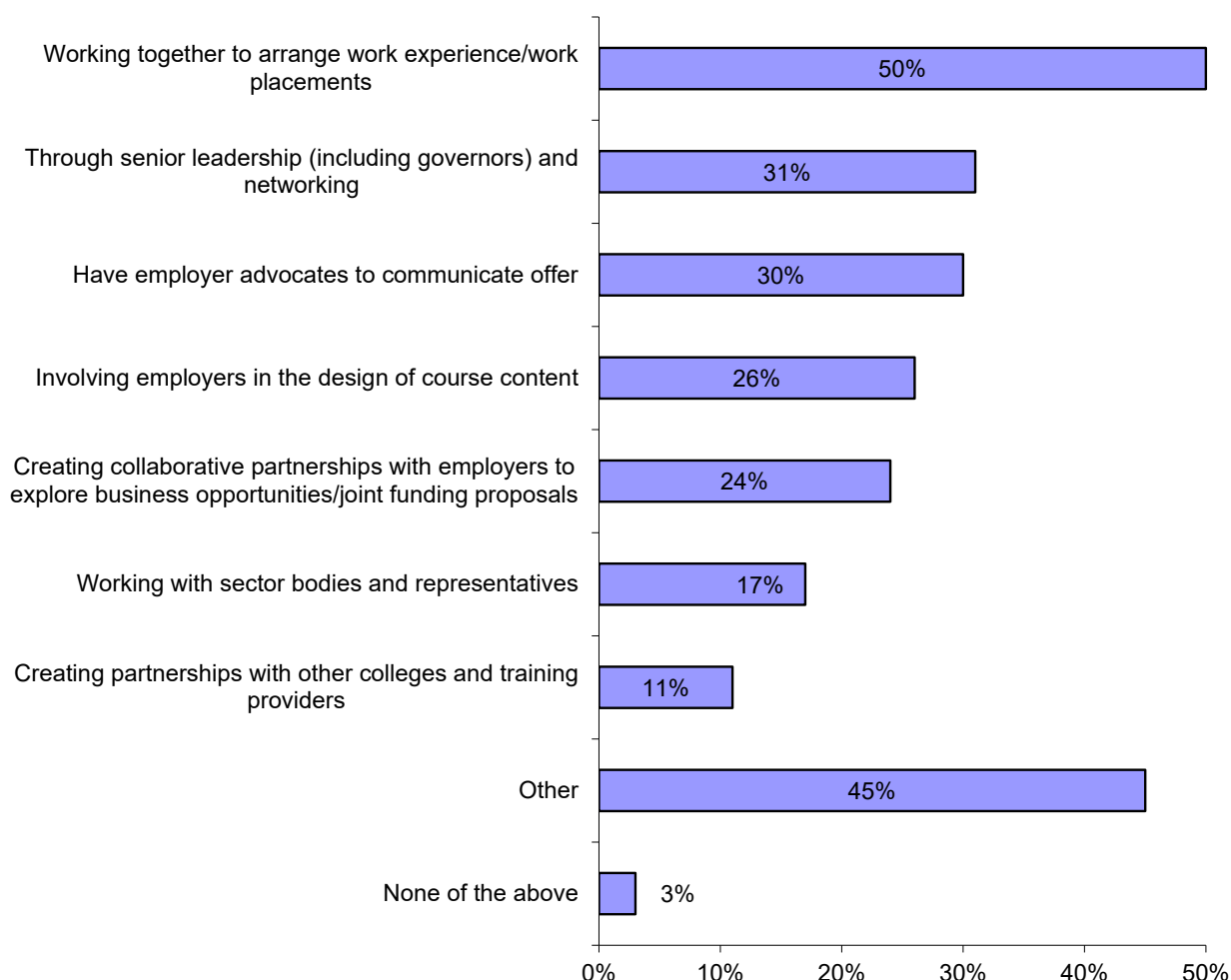
Activities undertaken in order to develop links with employers *recently* (ie. in the last year) reflected the ways that FE providers engage with employers (see **Figure 52**). Thus, FE providers that have engaged with employers are most likely to have worked with employers to arrange work experience/work placements (50%), followed by engagement through senior leadership (including governors), networking (31%), and working with employer advocates (30%).

Around a quarter of FE providers that have engaged with employers have involved employers in the design of course content (26%) and/or created collaborative partnerships with employers to explore business opportunities/joint funding proposals (24%).

Fewer have worked with sector bodies and representatives (17%) and/or created partnerships with other colleges and training providers (11%).

The frequency of any of these activities was higher amongst FE colleges than private providers, particularly with regard to: senior leadership and networking (43%, compared with 26%); involving employers in the design of course content (39%, compared with 22%); creating collaborative partnerships (34%, compared with 20%); and working with sector bodies and representatives (24%, compared with 13%).

Figure 53: Activities undertaken recently in order to develop links with employers



Q3E, where activities undertaken to engage with employers, base=303

Why changes were made

The FE reforms appear to have prompted and assisted new ways of working for some, but others reported that these had made little difference to their plans or activities. Many reported working with employers and employer organisations as a general policy to ensure relevant and suitable provision, which met the needs of local labour markets, as a key driver.

General FE colleges

In more detail, some of the increased partnership activity reported by the general FE colleges had been stimulated by the FE reforms. For example, one college said that they had overhauled the way that they worked with employers and that FE reform had assisted them to do this. They had set up an employer-facing company to manage employer relationships for the college, as they believed that employers might respond more positively to dealing with a company regarding recruitment and selection. They felt that they would probably have had the freedom to do this prior to the reforms, but that the reforms provided an additional incentive:

'Not that we had a freedom we didn't have before. We could have done this before, but part of the way we've responded is by setting up an employer-facing company to manage our employer relationships. We were headed in that direction, but it wasn't something we did until relatively recently... I think that reshaping of the way in which we respond to employers has been very significant.' (General FE College)

Others spoke of the reforms as having increased the pace of the changes that were already happening:

'The reforms have made it change, it was already changing by necessity, the reforms are that added catalyst.' (General FE College)

'The incentives and the encouragement to work with employers are extremely positive.' (General FE College)

Some of the colleges mentioned developing employer partnerships for the purposes of apprenticeships (see chapter 12 for more detail on this). A number of colleges stressed that a crucial driver for working with employers was to ensure that their provision met employers' needs, as well as learners' aspirations. Meeting the needs of the local labour market, through working with employers, LEPs and employer organisations was seen to be a priority when planning and developing provision:

'We work very well with employers. Our role is not just to fill short-term labour gaps in the market. When you ask employers, none of their kids have been told they must go forth and fill a short-term gap in the local labour market. We try and broker a good solution between what young people want to do and what employers and the economy needs them to do. The other thing is, we're training people, in the region, for an England economy, for a UK economy, and even for a global economy.' (General FE College)

'We understand the importance of facing your curriculum and your college towards the employer, because the concept of this is, you take these learners out of college and put them into work.' (General FE College)

General FE colleges that had started to work with other colleges, schools, or other providers gave several reasons for this. The first was in order to bid collaboratively for large scale funds such as ESF. A second reason was in order to ensure that each college understood their market position and specialisms in order to ensure collaborative provision in the region and to avoid competition which could be counterproductive for all. One college was moving towards a federation model with sister colleges, in order work more flexibly and collaboratively and to enable sharing of services and leadership.

A number of colleges reported that some of the most recent partnership activity would have happened regardless of the reforms. They said that that partnership working was already increasingly important to them, particularly in order to focus their offers on local and business needs

Private providers

The FE reforms appear to have had a positive impact on partnership working for some private providers. However, many private providers were already very keen to work in partnership with employers and others in order to grow their business, raise standards and ensure they were able to operate effectively and equip learners with the right skills. Thus, private providers also cited potential business benefits arising from partnerships as a key driver for the work they had put into working with employers and others:

'We work more closely with some other training providers but it's difficult to say whether we've increased our work with other training providers because we always did cooperate with each other. I think it's continued and there might be a bit more of it... So maybe it does encourage people to work a bit closer together, because you have to now.' (Private Provider)

Some providers mentioned their employer partnerships in respect of apprenticeship involvement. Like the General FE Colleges, a primary aim of working with employers was to ensure that they provided their learners with the right skills for jobs and to offer courses and programmes which meet the needs of local businesses. Some of the closer working with LEPs was not felt to be as a result of reform but was rather, to increase providers' responsiveness to labour market skills needs.

One provider, a membership organisation, had recently had a new CEO who had guided the organisation to relaunch their membership in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce. They had repositioned themselves to be more employer-driven and to play a stronger role in local employment and economic requirements. They were also working much more closely with the LEP:

'What we're doing is very much around contextualising environments that are very much focused on the needs of industry. It's very much labour market led... Our alignment with the LEP, we had no involvement with the LEP whatsoever, prior to me arriving here. I recognised very, very quickly that we needed to be in a position where we could at least support and provide a different voice around the table at LEP.' (Private Provider)

Similarly, another provider said that they had increased their partnerships with the LEP and their Local Authority, in order to continually benchmark themselves against the needs of the local economy:

'We're involved in the LEP at a senior level, we're involved in the post-16 executive with the city council. So, we've been able to read the signs and so forth, and get a sense of how to try and position ourselves. It's really just a constant review of what we do.' (Private Provider)

Working more collaboratively with employers, Local Authorities and with schools, colleges and other providers was for many, seen as an opportunity to widen funding sources. In contrast, one provider reported that the agenda and requirements from Ofsted was their biggest motivation for change:

'Ofsted are probably the biggest driving force for the organisation. Obviously Ofsted is working towards the government's agenda for driving things forward. If Ofsted says, we like your innovation in this area, you know that the next time you have your Ofsted inspection that you're going to have to have gone an extra mile at least. So you're always looking for ways that you can improve things for students and employers.' (Private Provider)

'Other' providers

A few 'other' providers felt that the reforms had prompted some of their increased activity while others thought that the reforms had not affected this. For example, one said that they were trying to work with a wider range of different partners than they would have done prior to the reforms, due to increased competition. This had brought about a stronger culture of partnership and sharing. Another had increased its employability-relevant activities.

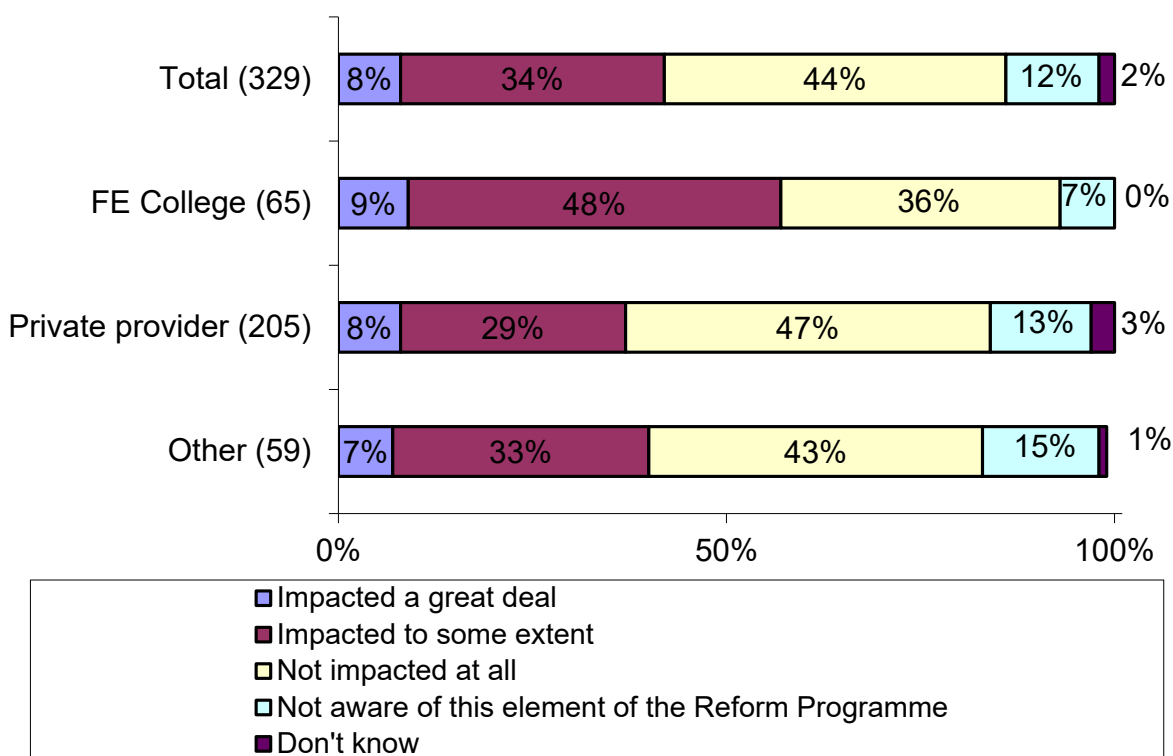
A number of the 'other' providers were not convinced that their increased partnership working was due to the reform programme. This included one provider who had increased SME partnerships and another that said that, while their relationship with the Local Authority had improved, the reform programme had not necessarily shaped or re-shaped their activities.

Impact of the changes

In survey, FE providers were asked about the extent to which removing restrictions to enable new ways of working with other organisations has impacted on their organisation (see **Figure 53**). One in eight (12%) were not aware of this element of the Reform programme. More than two-fifths (44%) said it has not impacted on their organisation at all. This proportion was higher amongst private providers than amongst FE colleges (47%, compared with 36%).

Two-fifths of FE providers (41%) reported at least some impact, of which a minority (8% of all) reported that it has impacted on their organisation a great deal. FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to report that it has impacted to some extent (48%, compared with 29%), while the proportions of FE colleges and private providers reporting a great deal of impact were similar (9% and 8% respectively).

Figure 54: Extent to which removing restrictions to enable new ways of working with other organisations has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_4, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

In depth interviews, some providers of all types reported improved and closer working with employers as a direct result of FE reform. This had in turn led to changes to the curriculum as they better understood what employers needed and learned to flex their provision to accommodate this. However, other providers reported that many of these changes and impacts were not specifically due to the reform programme and others reported that there had been no particular changes or impact as a result of the reforms.

The Reform programme appeared to have assisted some general FE colleges in particular to introduce some employer-led innovations that they would not otherwise have done. Some private providers reported that the nature and function of their relationships had changed, but not the volume of these. A few private providers reported that the reforms had produced some negative impacts for them, particularly as a result of more 16-18 years olds staying on at school. No clear pattern emerged from 'other' providers with regard to the impact of the reforms on their partnerships and the impact on their organisations. Some reported a positive impact; others reported that little had changed for them as yet.

General FE colleges

In greater detail, a few of the general FE colleges said that their improved relationships with employers and other external organisations were entirely due to the FE Reform programme. More said that the reforms had helped them to make changes, or had supported changes that were planned or already underway:

'It has strengthened what we are doing with employers, but if the premise was we were doing nothing with employers before and now we're doing lots, that's wrong. I think we were already doing things with employers, we probably do more now which is great. It has probably helped that the government is pushing the employer link but I wouldn't want anybody to think that we were doing nothing before, because we were.' (General FE College)

Many of the general FE colleges reported that they now had closer or improved relationships with employers and a greater understanding of employers' needs as a result. This had in turn had led to their provision having become more relevant to the skills employers look for when recruiting:

'I suppose to a certain extent it's galvanised closer relationships with employers... we're very keen to make sure that the outcomes of the study programme lead to proper jobs rather than just getting a qualification.' (General FE College)

A few had set up specific employer-related innovations as a result of the reforms. For example, one now had an employer's technical innovation centre on their campus, where learners could work with the employer to test out products, software, and apps. Another college had nurtured intensive input from a particular employer and this had resulted in new practical learning environment being set up at the college. They commented that relationships with employers took time to come to fruition:

'You step back, develop those relationships and bizarrely, the business or more business comes from it and doing it in a transitional way but it's a

longer game. It takes longer. You've got to be in it for one to two years. So we've learned a lot, but the length of time it takes, you've got to be prepared for that long.' (General FE College)

One college reported that they had yet to complete the introduction of their new study programmes – they perceived this to be a 'colossal' task. Another said that the number of colleges in their region meant that there was some competition to partner with employers, a situation that was perhaps not very conducive for employers:

'The competitive element means that you've got lots of colleges trying to get in touch with employers so there isn't really a, very sensible coherent communication.' (General FE College)

One college commented that they felt government had failed to get employers to contribute to the cost of programmes.

Private providers

Some private providers reported substantial positive impacts on their organisations through partnership working as a result of FE reform. They now worked more closely and more strategically with employers and had learnt to adapt their engagement and provision to suit what the market needed:

'If our market is to deliver those vocational qualifications to whatever the age group may be, sometimes the demographics may change, but it's still predominantly the same offer, but we may have to work slightly differently to recruit those people, and we may have to do some fundamental work with them before we get them onto the programmes.' (Private Provider)

Many private providers had longstanding relationships with their employer networks, but some said that the nature of these partnerships had changed as a result of the reforms as they had become more proactive with employers. One provider highlighted that since the reforms they had needed to get employers to have greater input to ensure that learners reach the appropriate levels:

'That involves the employer being much more proactive. So there's been a change in that relationship.' (Private Provider)

Some private providers reported that they now had a closer working relationship with employers and other relevant partners but that this was not specifically an impact of the FE reforms, although the reforms had legitimised this activity somewhat. Some said that the reforms programme had not, as yet, had any impact on their organisation with regard to partnership working:

'We always have seen employers as crucial, it's not something new to us.'
(Private Provider)

'Local authorities approach us if they identify a need, and we respond, so I think from that point of view, we are perceived as being responsive, but I don't think that's necessarily as a result of government. That's just our approach... When the LEPs first came about, we said, 'Right, we need to be palling up with them,' and so, strategically, we've done that, so I haven't waited for government directives.' (Private Provider)

A few private providers reported that the reforms had produced some negative impacts for them. One provider mentioned that their contact with employers had reduced as they were increasingly favouring NVQ-type qualifications rather than full frameworks. Another highlighted the reduction of the Adult Skills Budget and also that schools were increasingly trying to retain 16-18 years olds for the funding they attract. Similarly, a third mentioned the impact of learners staying on at sixth form rather than leaving to take up apprenticeships both on their organisation and on employers who were trying to recruit:

'The biggest shame is the employers are now ringing up saying, 'Where are all these youngsters?' and I'm saying, 'I'm really sorry, they're all at school.' So, it's having a huge impact on small businesses, because they can't get them.' (Private Provider)

'Other' providers

No clear pattern emerged from 'other' providers in respect of the impact of the reforms on their external relationships. One reported that they now had to work in partnership with Local Authorities across their region, and that this was a substantial and positive impact of the reforms. One highlighted that that their employer contact had increased as a direct result of FE reforms, resulting in guaranteed interview schemes for learners on employer-relevant courses:

'We're doing many more of these, employers telling us, 'Well if people get such and such qualifications we'll give them a guaranteed interview.'
(Other Provider)

Another increasingly focused their provision on what they learned through their employer engagement and through engagement with the LEPs in their region. They focused their provision on these requirements– but it was sometimes challenging to fit everyone's priorities into the curriculum:

'Generally, we focus on the courses that do meet LEP priorities or that do offer quite good jobs or other destinations or lead on to university and higher education. You need to be very clear about that.' (Other Provider)

One provider said that they felt the reforms had not influenced what they did but had made employers more aware that they needed to form partnerships with providers in order to influence skills provision programmes and to help create the pool of labour they needed:

'We have to make those links anyway. What the government's emphasis has done is made employers more aware of the fact that they need to form partnerships with us, to help the unemployment situation and skills deficit, but also to help themselves.' ('Other' Provider)

Some 'other' providers reported that reforms had not impacted on the scale of their involvement with employers and other organisations. For example, one reported that they had always had a good relationship with employers in their area, particularly with SMEs in their sector. This had continued but they also continued to find it difficult to engage with larger employers:

'Well, we've always had a good relationship with them.... that's because we're part of their sector, and, unfortunately, the large employers that surround us are, on the whole, not that interested.' ('Other' Provider)

10. Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Key findings

Improving the quality of teaching and learning was a key element of the FE Reform programme and there was widespread awareness of it amongst providers, with the majority reporting an impact. Overall, providers were supportive of the increased focus on teaching and learning – with new staff, systems, and ways of working being put in place to support improvement. Significant investment and developments in the use of technology had been made by providers to improve the experience of learning and teaching for learners. The results of changes were being realised with more than four in ten providers perceiving an improvement as a result of changes made.

Perceived impact

Given the high priority placed on the quality of teaching and learning by providers and other key drivers such as external inspection, it was difficult for some to attribute changes to the FE Reform programme specifically. However, a number of providers perceived that they were moving towards excellence – and considered that some of the reforms had at least facilitated this progress. Some providers had supporting evidence of this improvement – for example, improved observation of teaching grades. Survey findings also highlighted perceived impacts for learners.

Unanticipated consequences

Although few providers reported a reduction in quality, challenges had been encountered in making improvements (or at least on the scale desired) within the context of funding constraints and significant curriculum reform. Perceived threats to maintaining a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning include organisation mergers and the competing priorities that will arise from this, and also the loss of skilled staff at a time of uncertainty for the sector.

Introduction

A key element of the reform programme for the Further Education system, as set out in *New Challenges, New Chances* was ‘Excellence in Teaching and Learning’. The Reform Plan set out the Government’s commitment to develop and promote excellent teaching, including establishing an independent commission on adult education and vocational pedagogy, and facilitating a review of professional standards in the FE sector.

The Independent Review of Professionalism in Further Education published its final report in October 2012. The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL), tasked with developing a framework to enhance the quality and to improve the outcomes and impact of adult vocational teaching and learning for learners and

employers, reported its findings in March 2013. Recommendations of both inquiries have been taken forward by the Education and Training Foundation (and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service prior to the Foundation).

The Education and Training Foundation was established in October 2013 and is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The Foundation is owned by sector representative bodies and works with teachers, leaders and businesses – in a range of ways – to help them deliver excellent further and vocational education and training.

In 2012, Ofsted published a new Common Inspection Framework which has been in operation until the end of August 2015.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

Seventy- two per cent of surveyed providers reported implementing practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Qualitative research provided more detail on the types of changes providers had implemented or were in the process of implementing. Changes both at a strategic and operational level were highlighted, with a number of providers introducing a range of developments:

‘We’re majoring on the teaching and learning...it’s a big agenda.’ (Private Provider)

The main types of changes can be categorised as follows: staff recruitment; staff training and support; use of technology; access to external support; and changes to organisational culture and infrastructure. Change in each of these areas is discussed below

Staff recruitment

A number of providers interviewed in depth reported creating new posts and appointing members of staff with a specific brief around quality improvement in order to help support and strengthen teaching and learning practice:

‘We have invested a lot in improving quality... we now have a Quality Improvement Director, and we have a Quality Manager, and we have a team of two individuals that sit under that position. It’s a big investment, but seen as absolutely critical.’ (Private Provider)

One college referred to appointing a Director of Teaching and Learning who sits on the Executive and ensures a continuous focus on the quality of teaching and learning. The college also employs a team of Teaching and Learning Coaches. Another provider also

referred to the recent appointment of a Teaching and Learning Coach within their organisation. The role of the coach includes responsibility for the observation of teaching process and grade profiling. They will also deliver specific workshops and other interventions with members of staff to address any development needs identified through observation. Such interventions could include individual support, paired activity or peer-working:

'Our desire is obviously to only have teaching and learning observation activity that results in a one or a two grade.' (Private Provider)

As highlighted in other chapters of this report, some providers have invested in and made changes to their staffing structures to support the effective delivery of teaching and learning in particular subject areas and types of provision. The introduction of study programmes had resulted in some significant changes to planning and delivery for some providers. One College described the delivery of study programmes as a 'major change' for them which had a number of implications, including staffing:

'We've had to re-arrange the delivery of the study programme. We've had to change the staff, we've had to train the staff, and we've had to bring an English and maths co-ordinator in order to deliver the study programme.' (General FE College)

A number of providers have recruited new members of staff to support the delivery of maths and English. One provider spoke of making several appointments from the Education and Training Foundation's maths graduate programme. However, the particular challenge of recruiting maths tutors due to lack of capacity in the sector and the significant competition from other providers was commonly reported and providers needed to adopt different strategies to secure the necessary skills required, for example, upskilling their functional skills tutors:

'We have an associate who's an inspector who's working with us on English and maths as well at the moment.' (Private Provider)

Some providers gave details on the essential skills they sought when appointing new delivery staff to their organisation, in addition to subject-specific knowledge. As one private provider commented, teaching qualifications were less of a priority for them at appointment than having individuals who could manage groups of learners and engage them in learning:

'We tend to recruit from industry where we can and then develop up staff into the teaching roles...that's how we like to work. So I suppose we come from more of an employer-based approach to start off with...we engage quite heavily with those learners who, traditionally, wouldn't go into a mainstream setting...to me what's crucial is behaviour management as opposed to a teaching qualification'

effectiveness in terms of communication, being able to bring to life subject matter and relevancy of it to those young people.’ (Private Provider)

Another provider spoke of the importance of taking on teaching staff with skills in the use of digital technology. A number of providers had also appointed non-teaching staff with expertise in digital technology to support tutors to develop their confidence and competence in this area. One college, which had set up a new department around five years ago to facilitate greater use of technology across the organisation, said staffing had increased to 12 members of staff in recent years:

‘If you’re going to learn now, you know, you don’t learn with handouts and workbooks, and goodness knows what... you’re using many different things.’

Staff training and support

A range of examples were put forward concerning changes to staff training and support to maintain and improve standards in the quality of teaching and learning, and, effectively, to deliver new provision e.g. Study Programmes, GCSE English and maths. These changes included revisions to staff induction processes and probationary periods, investment in observation of teaching processes, working with staff to create individual development plans and sharing information and good practice – about the Common Inspection Framework or PREVENT Agenda for example – through staff forums or ‘away days’:

‘Our starting point was to give it a real, individual focus, and to say to each and every member of staff...’what are you going to do to improve the quality of what we do?we got every teacher to focus on three of their weakness and do a development programme...it’s been a really successful programme. It is very much doing different things than we were doing before.’ (General FE College)

Providers also spoke about in-house training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, and there were references to practitioners undertaking external courses and formal teaching qualifications, including PGCE and Specialist Diplomas.

In the area of English and maths provision, several providers spoke about setting up training programmes for existing staff. One college said it was important to ‘create a pipeline of maths and English teachers’ given the ongoing demand for such capacity and the possibility that some staff will move on. Several private providers made reference to their staff taking part in the Education and Training Foundation’s enhancement programmes and staff sharing their learning with colleagues.

‘A new member of staff was appointed from the Maths graduate programme. She has been instrumental in working with our tutors to start broadening their skill sets... We made use of the Maths enhancement programme as well, in terms of

preparing vocational staff as best we can, to deliver on GCSE, developing a whole new load of resources onto our VLE as well, with regards to support, and are rolling out some workshops as well, to make sure that we look at everything that we deliver.' (Private Provider)

Other activities to increase vocational tutors' interest and confidence in English and maths were also mentioned by providers. One college commented:

'Students just reflect the attitudes of staff. If you've got groups of students who refuse to do maths and English, it's because the staff aren't really promoting it properly.' (General FE College)

One private provider spoke of reforming their team of observers and investing in specialist training for members of the team to support them in their role. This provider has also introduced a timetable of observations and also moderation panels which previously had been completed on an ad-hoc basis. The moderation panels support benchmarking against other providers.

Use of technology

Ninety-one per cent of providers in the provider survey reported increasing the use of technology to deliver teaching and learning or in terms of its availability to learners. Virtually all FE colleges reported this. The main reason reported by providers in depth interviews for the use of technology was 'to generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for learners':

'The use of the Internet as a resource in the classroom has utterly transformed in the last five years. So there have definitely been changes in the form of delivery.' (General FE College)

A number of providers interviewed in depth spoke of making significant investment and advances in their use of technology to enhance their delivery and meet learner and employer expectations. One college, building on work with JISC, has set a target for 20% of its curriculum to be delivered through online platforms and resources. Another provider said they now have ILT champions in each department and one provider has a forum on technology which is led by members of staff and informs organisational strategy as well as practice. There were references to staff training on Moodle for example and an expectation that members of staff would participate in CPD opportunities to develop their skills.

A private provider had secured funding to deliver a subject-specific project around the use of technology to support learning. Members of staff had been involved in developing the project from the outset and choosing the technology to purchase. The project has put in place additional support for learners during their lessons so that they are not wasting

time waiting for their teacher to help them, which can be difficult if there is a large number of learners in the class. This provider promoted technology as something which would be complementary and supportive of teaching – and not as a replacement for it. They gained staff buy-in quickly:

‘What we’ve done is, we’ve identified, in effect, champions within the organisation that very quickly and readily bought into the concept. Then we used those to start to roll it out across the organisation.’ (Private Provider)

Now the technology is in place, its potential is being realised and it is being used in different ways. Some providers spoke about how they are making use of technology to observe, reflect on and improve teaching practice. For example:

‘Right from the very start staff bought into the whole project... Now we’re finding that they’re coming to us with fresh ways and fresh ideas of using it.’ (Private Provider)

For some providers, the use of technology continues to be a key area for development. One in six providers surveyed had increased provision to enable learners to use their own device. This was flagged as a priority for others:

‘The next technological jump is for people to use their own equipment, and we haven’t fully broken that yet.’ (General FE College)

External support

Several providers made references to external agencies and resources (e.g. Excellence Gateway) that provided support which enabled them to make enhancements to the quality of their provision and delivery:

‘I find the AoC a very useful organisation in terms of keeping us briefed and up to speed.’ (General FE College)

One provider highlighted how they and other colleges in the region had worked on a number of projects with their regional Ofsted office to facilitate the identifying and sharing of good practice. There were also references to visiting other providers (outside the local area) to learn from their practice.

Another important partner for some colleges was employers. One college spoke of making fundamental changes to the way they work with employers and how this was facilitating better teaching and learning practices. Employers were supporting them to revise the learning environment so that it is more reflective of a work environment. For example, for construction, the college’s construction space is being transformed so that it replicates a building site:

‘The way we deliver, the way we operate, is trying to reflect the work practices of that particular industry.’ (General FE College)

Another college spoke of a number of employers from the digital sector renting space on the campus. In return they will be providing mentoring support to learners and providing support with the testing of new education software and Apps.

Why changes were made

The changes made by providers to improve the quality of teaching and learning were the result of a number of factors, including the FE Reform programme. A number of providers highlighted that teaching and learning was a very high priority for them (their core purpose) and they were committed to continuous improvement in this area. As reported in the *Evaluation of the New Challenges, New Chances Further Education and Skills Reform Plan*, there was evidence of internal drivers to quality improvement:

‘This is absolutely critical...it’s about professional standards, it’s about really driving, stretching and challenging your learners...to me, delivering quality teaching and learning has to be what we’re here for.’ (General FE College)

Some providers spoke of taking action in response to a ‘disappointing’ external inspection and recommendations made by Ofsted. One college spoke of making a significant investment in teaching and learning after being awarded a lower grade from Ofsted than in their previous inspection. This had driven them to make considerable changes to the way they were operating in order to bring about improvements. This provider noted the challenges of the 2012 common inspection framework for a number of colleges and how other institutions had also gone from being graded as a good provider to one which ‘requires improvement’.

‘On the quality side, we definitely felt driven by the stick as well, and the challenge to improve.’ (General FE College)

Many of the changes to teaching and learning linked directly to curriculum development which resulted from the FE Reform programme, including the move to GCSE maths and English as a condition of funding, implementation of 16-19 study programmes, apprenticeship reform, and also the requirement to be more responsive to local communities, including employers. Changes were required to address new policy priorities and to address skills gaps needed to deliver new provision and bring about cultural change within organisations:

‘We’re very much driving our whole curriculum, our offer to try and ensure all of our learners, all ages, all levels become the most employable.’ (General FE College)

One private provider spoke of making changes to their recruitment policy and the support they offer to staff, due in part to developments (and learner and employer expectations) around the use of technology. However, perhaps surprisingly, there were no specific references to the introduction of a loans system as a driver of improved quality.

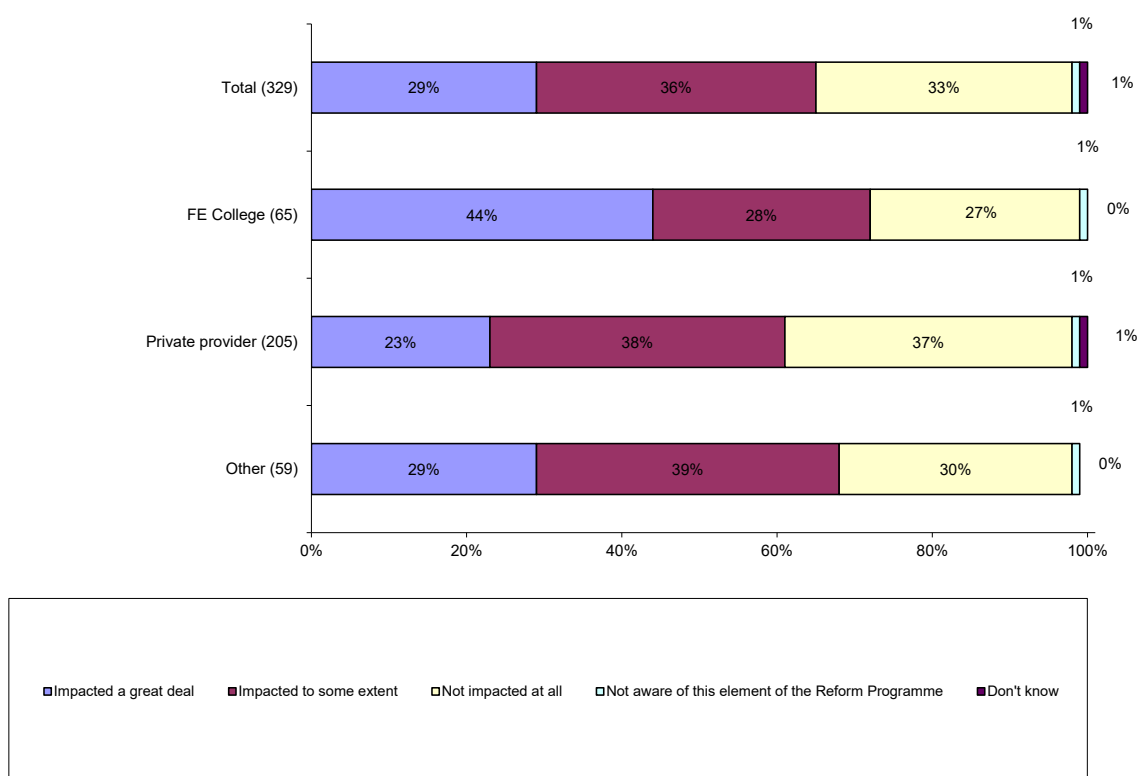
Perceived impact of the changes

Impact of quality and learning reforms

In the provider survey, FE providers were asked about the extent to which improving the quality of teaching and learning has impacted on their organisation (see **Figure 54**). Only 1% of providers were not aware of this element of the Reform programme.

Two-thirds of all providers (65%) reported at least some impact, of which approaching half (29%) reported that it had impacted on their organisation a great deal. FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to report that it had impacted a great deal (44%, compared with 23%), while private providers were slightly more likely to report an impact to some extent (37% compared with 27% of colleges). A third of all providers (33%) said it had not impacted on their organisation at all. This proportion was higher amongst private providers than amongst FE colleges (37%, compared with 27%):

Figure 55: Extent to which improving the quality of teaching and learning has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_6, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

Findings from the qualitative interview programme indicate that providers were very positive about the focus on ensuring excellent teaching and learning. This was something they were committed to and a key objective for their organisation:

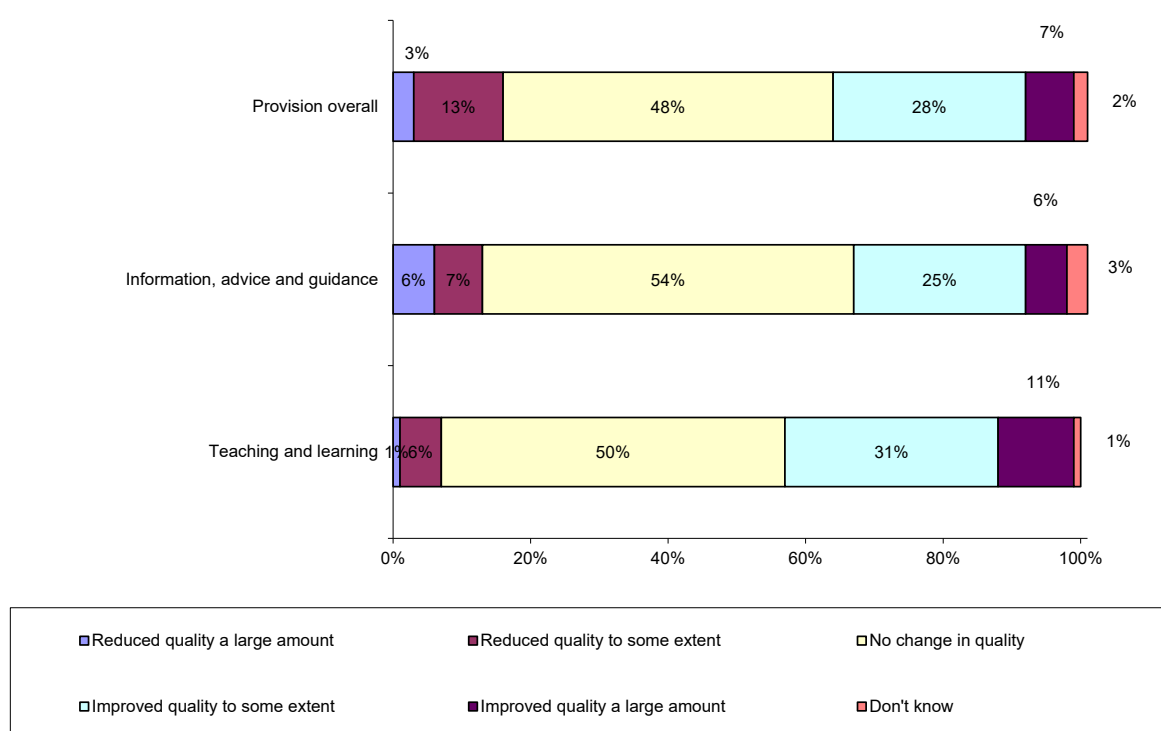
'In terms of teaching and learning I think the whole change in the sector, and the focus on teaching and learning, and away from a purely assessment driven model has to be applauded.' (Private Provider)

'Ultimately, if we don't get it right, it's the learner that suffers, isn't it? We can't afford to be practising at getting it right.' (General FE College)

Impacts on different aspects of provider performance

In the quantitative survey, respondents were asked to identify the effects of reform on the quality of three features of provider performance – overall provision, information and guidance (IAG), and teaching and learning. **Figure 55** shows that around half of all providers reported no impact. The proportion reporting positive impact was greater than the proportion reporting negative impact in respect of teaching and learning. However, the converse was true in respect of overall provision and IAG. In these cases, more employers reported negative impacts than reported positive ones.

Figure 56: Extent to which reforms have affected the quality of different aspects of provider performance



Q5A_A, all respondents, base=329

All FE providers who took part in the survey were asked about the extent to which the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved the quality of teaching and learning. More than two-fifths (42%) felt there had been an improvement as a result of the changes. This included 11% that felt there had been a large amount of improvement to the quality of the teaching and learning. Just 7% perceived a reduction in quality – mainly to some extent rather than a large extent (6% of all). While half (50%) felt that there had been no change in quality, it is probable these include a high proportion of those who had indicated the reform had had no impact on them.

One college interviewed in depth said that the increased focus on teaching and learning through the reform programme had been reflected in their achieving two outstanding grades from Ofsted. Positive publicity through local media and through word of mouth by learners had subsequently helped them to recruit learners and grow their 16-18 provision. They reported this growth as having protected them in part from recent reductions in funding for adult learning. Other providers spoke of achieving higher success rates in some areas of their provision, improved grades in observations of teaching and learning and positive feedback from Ofsted on their progress:

'I think we didn't need much incentive to focus on teaching and learning, and we've done it, and we think the proof of that is our value added.' (General FE College)

One provider believed that there had been improvements to quality. However, this may not necessarily be evidenced by an improvement in Ofsted grade:

'I think we're definitely more focused on quality, although if you look at it in terms of inspection results, you would say it hasn't had an impact in the region. We've jumped, but the bar's risen more quickly than we've been able to jump. We are definitely better, in my view.' (General FE College)

Impacts on the quality of provision overall

All FE providers in the quantitative survey were asked about the extent to which the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved the quality of provision *overall*. Again, nearly half (48%) felt that there had been no change in quality, while around a third (35%) felt there had been an improvement as a result of the changes. This included 7% that felt there had been a large amount of improvement to the quality of provision overall. One in seven (14%) perceived a reduction in quality – mainly 'to some extent' rather than to 'a large extent' (13% of all).

By provider type (see **Figure 56**), FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to perceive a reduction in the quality of overall provision (25%, compared with 13%). Private providers were significantly more likely than FE colleges to be neutral and report a perception that there had been no change in the overall quality of provision as a result of the changes (51%, compared with 36%).

Figure 57: Extent to which the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved the quality of provision overall

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Reduced quality a large amount	3%	4%	3%	1%
Reduced quality to some extent	13%	21%	10%	11%
No change in quality	48%	36%	51%	51%
Improved quality to some extent	28%	30%	28%	22%
Improved quality a large amount	7%	6%	6%	13%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	2%

Q5A_C, all respondents, bases shown in table

Other ways in which reforms have improved quality

Around a quarter of FE providers (28%) cited other ways in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have *improved* quality (see **Figure 57**). One in eight of all FE providers (12%) perceived an improved focus on efficiencies and quality of delivery across all areas. Just 1%-2% mentioned an improved focus on employer relationships/involvement, an improved focus on skill needs of the local community, and the introduction of study programmes. A small minority (4%) made negative comments with regard to this subject.

Figure 58: Other specific ways in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved quality

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Improved focus on efficiencies & quality of delivery across all areas	12%	12%	12%	12%
Negative comments	4%	4%	4%	2%
Improved focus on employer relationships/involvement	2%	5%	1%	2%
Improved focus on skill needs of the local community	1%	2%	*%	1%
Introduction of study programs	1%	3%	0%	0%
Other	9%	16%	7%	7%
None	71%	61%	74%	76%
Don't know	1%	1%	*%	0%

Q5B, all respondents, bases shown in table

One provider which took part in the qualitative research said that the introduction of study programmes had provided them with a structure for developing and improving their provision and ensuring a more consistent approach in delivery across the organisation. Prior to study programmes, the quality of their teaching and learning had been judged by Ofsted as adequate.

Other ways in which reforms have reduced quality

Half of FE providers surveyed (49%) mentioned other ways in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have *reduced* quality (see **Figure 58**). They most frequently mentioned their perception that reduced funding has had a negative impact on the range of subjects provided, had reduced staff levels and the extent of learning support, and/or had reduced morale (30% of all FE providers). One in twelve (8%) felt that reforms in GCSEs, particularly maths and English, has had a severe impact on students and apprenticeships. Just 2% mentioned an increase in bureaucracy and paperwork as a cause of a reduction in quality, while 4% mentioned a negative impact of age-related Adult Learning Loans.

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to list perceived detrimental effects of reduced funding (46%, compared with 22%) and of reforms in GCSEs (11%, compared with 4%). While 60% of FE colleges mentioned other ways in which reforms have reduced quality; only 40% of private providers did so.

Figure 59: Other specific ways in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have reduced quality

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Reduced funding has had a negative impact inc on quality provided, on range of subjects provided, reduced staff levels, reduced learning support, reduced morale	30%	46%	22%	34%
Reforms in the GCSEs, particularly Maths & English, will have severe impact on students & apprenticeships	8%	11%	4%	15%
Negative impact of age related/adult learning loans	4%	3%	4%	3%
Increased bureaucracy and paperwork	2%	1%	3%	2%
Other	11%	5%	13%	10%
None	51%	40%	60%	38%
Don't know	*%	0%	*%	1%

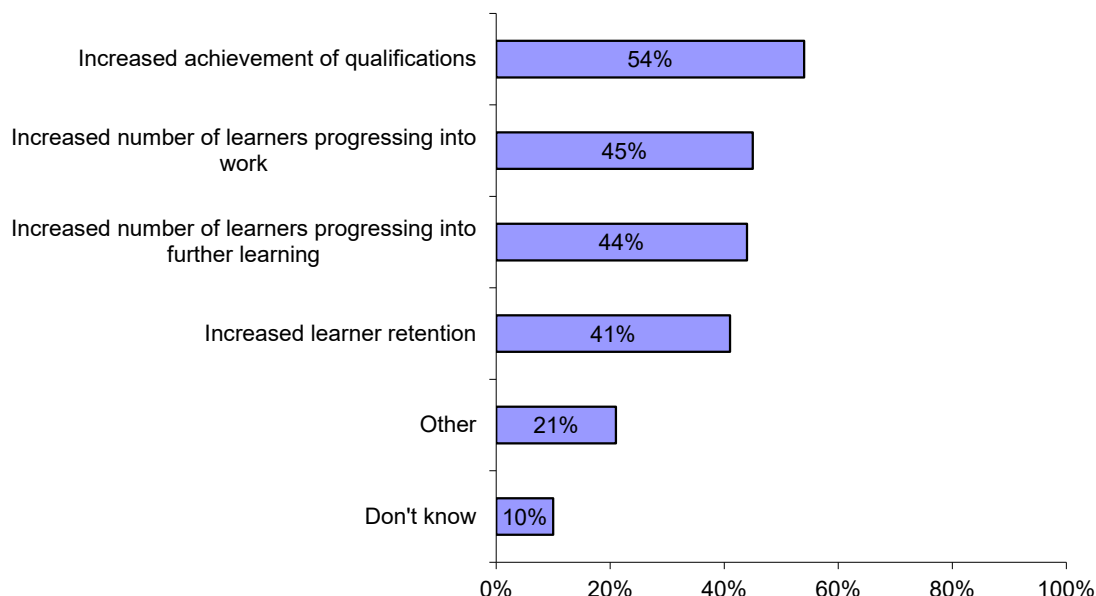
Q5C, all respondents, bases shown in table

Benefits to learners

As noted earlier, a third of FE providers (35%) felt that the quality of teaching and learning has improved as a result of the reforms. These FE providers were asked to suggest ways in which learners have benefited. They were most likely to mention (see **Figure 59**) increased achievement in qualifications (54%). Around two-fifths in each case perceived the benefits to be: an increase in the number of learners progressing into work (45%); an increase in the number of learners progressing into further learning (44%); and an increase in learner retention (41%).

Each of these benefits was more likely to be mentioned by FE colleges than private providers, although differences were not statistically significant.

Figure 60: The perceived benefits for learners of improvements in quality

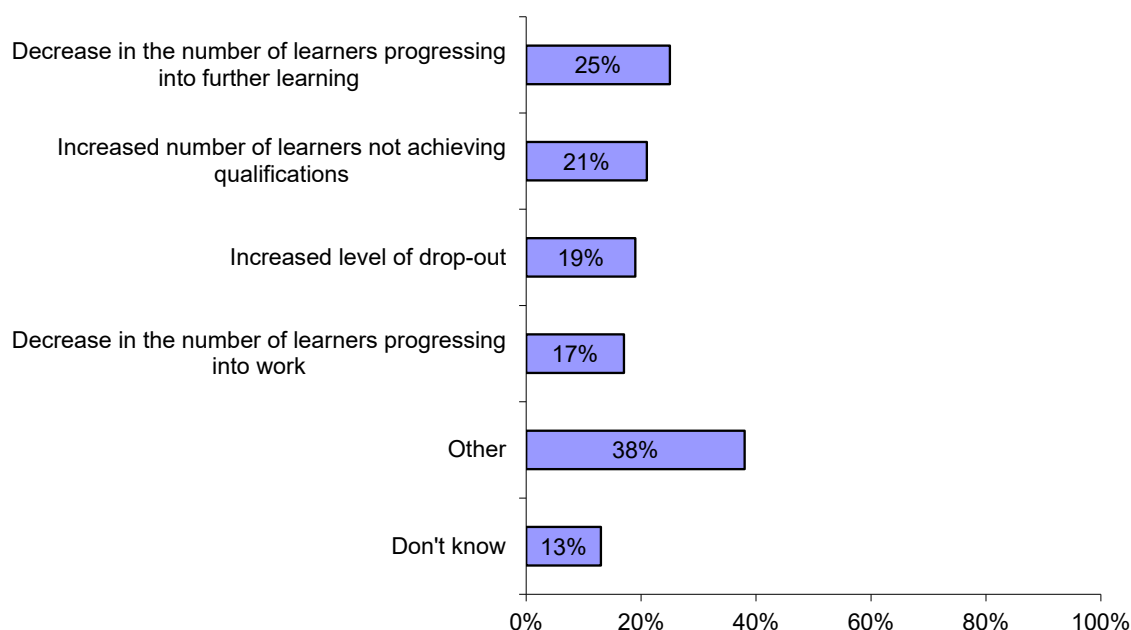


Q7, where improved quality in provision overall, base=114

Conversely, one in six FE providers (16%) felt that the quality of teaching and learning has reduced as a result of the reforms. They were asked to highlight the ways in which this perceived reduction in quality has impacted on learners.

They were most likely to mention (see **Figure 60**) a decrease in the number of learners progressing into further learning (25%), while slightly fewer mentioned an increase in the number of learners not achieving qualifications (21%). Other significant ways in which learners have been affected by reductions in the quality of teaching and learning, as perceived by this minority of FE providers, include an increase in the level of drop-out (19%) and a decrease in the number of learners progressing into work (17%). There are no significant differences by provider type, with FE colleges and private providers holding similar views in this respect.

Figure 61: The perceived impacts on learners of reductions in quality



Q8, where reduced quality in provision overall, base=50

Some providers interviewed as part of the qualitative research had faced challenges in securing appropriately trained and experienced staff to deliver English and maths provision and noted the negative impact for learners of this. They were upskilling staff but this takes time:

'The ability to teach what is now needed or wanted...the capacity and capabilities aren't there within the system at the moment. So prices are at a premium and the ability to gain and keep somebody is really hard. The impact of that on the learner is always negative.' (Private Provider)

The qualitative findings also provide more insight into the challenges of implementing changes and the factors which can limit or threaten positive impact. Concerns were raised by some providers during the qualitative interviews that the scale and pace of change in recent years had made it difficult to keep their focus on, and maintain a high standard of, teaching and learning.

'I think the Ofsted driver for quality and focus on the individual's achievement is right. I think the difficulty with that has been the way it has been implemented and things have changed constantly. It's that constantly moving goalpost that's really difficult for you to set and maintain KPIs and objectives and performance management for your team.' (Private Provider)

It was also reported that the frequency and nature of funding changes has been challenging and has impacted on staff morale and the ability to keep focused on

maintaining quality standards and make the required investments. One provider said that more mergers were likely given the funding reductions and this would threaten a focus on teaching and learning when there will be competing demands:

'The adaptive energies of any institution to deal with loads of curriculum reform and loads of assessment reform, eventually they start to be overtaken by the volume of reform. The real risk is that, if you're talking about the curriculum content and assessment practice, you're not talking about teaching and learning. Also, if you're talking about money, which more and more colleges are doing, you're not talking about teaching and learning in the same way.' (General FE College)

Some providers said they were at risk of losing skilled and experienced staff due to changes and uncertainties within the FE system. This posed serious challenges for the quality of teaching and learning in the future. One provider noted this was a particular challenge regarding vocational learning as staff could return to their specialist field.

'I probably have about five business plans currently in development for next year, none of which will be right. So that's making staff wobble. I'm facing greater churn in the business. So because you deal a lot with sector experts when you do applied and vocational learning, they can always go back to their sector. So yes, it's an absolute nightmare to be honest. I think you've lost a lot of talent within the sector, and probably, will continue to haemorrhage talent because of the uncertainty of the environment.' (Private Provider)

Particular concerns around the quality of teaching and learning were voiced around the changes to apprenticeships and the introduction of the trailblazers. Several private providers questioned the quality assurance arrangements that were being proposed. It was also suggested that setting targets on the quantity of apprenticeships could threaten a focus on quality.

'I'm not convinced on decoupling assessment and learning. ... for me I think quality is going to be very hard to manage. I'm not convinced that the awarding body should be the assessment authority either. I think that is very wrong.' (Private Provider)

One provider felt that there had been positive changes to teaching and learning for classroom based delivery, but that this had not been the case for other types of provision which are also government priorities. They called for action regarding this and for the new Common Inspection Framework to take account of this.

'I think improving quality of teaching and learning has to be the right thing... what's needed to underpin that is a new pedagogy and something which fits with applied and academic learning... The pedagogy is not really there for applied learning and work-based learning.' (Private Provider)

11. GCSE English and maths

Key findings

There has been a significant increase in the number of learners enrolling on GCSE courses at all provider types. FE Colleges have seen up to a tenfold increase in enrolments. FE Colleges and 'other' training providers are generally supportive of the reforms whilst private training providers report reactions ranging from full adoption to 'ignoring' the reforms. Despite the widespread uptake of GCSEs as benchmark qualifications, there remains some uncertainty regarding the long-term applicability of the qualification, particularly for learners following vocational pathways.

Perceived impact

Increased competition for both learners and staff has resulted in considerable changes to: staff recruitment practices; Continuing Professional Development offers (CPD); learner recruitment; initial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services, particularly in FE Colleges; and, the profile of teaching teams across all provider types. Alongside large-scale recruitment and retraining, FE colleges and private providers reported medium to large scale redundancies as learning offers narrowed and teaching teams were streamlined to meet the changing requirements. Overall, the reforms to GCSE maths and English have increased awareness of the quality of teaching and learning, with many changes intended to improve this and ensure learners meet the maths and English requirements.

Unanticipated consequences

A number of private training providers have reported making significant changes to recruitment practices to include or exclude certain learners. Learners with a grade D who have learning difficulties or disabilities and those with additional support needs or who are otherwise considered to be unlikely to achieve a grade C within the time constraints are most likely to be excluded by these recruitment practices. Similarly, some learners working towards vocational qualifications at Level 1 or 2 are being prevented from progressing to Level 3 qualifications as they have not achieved the required maths and English levels. In addition, there is a notable feeling of persecution amongst some FE providers as they feel the stringent achievement requirements put undue pressure on the FE sector.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

The GCSE maths and English reforms were classified by many of the interviewees as having significant impact. Twenty-four of the fifty respondents spoke about reforms concerning a range of topics, including: the restructured syllabus, the additional requirement for learners with D grades to automatically re-enrol on GCSE programmes, the increased focus upon academically-led maths and English qualifications, and the introduction of maths and English as a condition of funding.

General Further Education colleges were more likely to report significant changes in provision as a result of the reforms than other types of providers. They were also considerably more likely to report a range of challenges faced in implementing these changes. In the survey, more than half of FE providers (see **Figure 61**) perceived recruiting teaching staff (57%), training existing staff (56%), ensuring quality (54%), and motivating learners (37%) as significant challenges to implementing the reforms. Other challenges mentioned spontaneously by FE providers included time constraints (5%), costs/financial issues (4%), preference for Functional Skills (2%), employers not being in favour of the changes (2%), and logistics/capacity to hold exams (1%).

Private training providers reported the widest range of changes, although the extent to which the GCSE reforms affected their provision was also more variable. 'Other' training providers – including local authorities and adult and community learning providers – were the least likely to report experiencing significant changes in provision. Interestingly, neither private training providers nor 'other' training providers experienced significant challenges with learner motivation – only 7% and 6% respectively reported experiencing de-motivation among learners studying maths and English qualifications. Evidence from the qualitative interviews suggests that where there is de-motivation, this may be influenced by: the limited availability of pre-course Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); learners' previous experience in maths and English in compulsory education; and institutional attitudes towards the appropriateness of the GCSE qualification.

All provider types reported a significant increase in enrolments for maths and English. General FE colleges reported a marked increase in GCSE enrolments, whilst private training providers reported an increase in demand for both GCSE and Functional Skills. 'Other' training providers reported changes in learner demographics that resulted in a refocusing of maths and English provision to meet the needs of those learners.

Figure 62: The perceived challenges in responding to the Government's ambition to promote GCSEs as the national standard of English and Maths

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Recruiting teaching staff~	57%	86%	44%	63%
Training existing staff~	56%	76%	51%	48%
Ensuring quality~	54%	81%	45%	43%
Learners/students lack motivation/don't want to do this inc re-sits	14%	37%	7%	6%
Time constraints/not enough time for people in work	5%	8%	4%	4%
Costs/financial	4%	7%	3%	3%
Functional skills preferred	2%	3%	1%	4%
Employers not in favour	2%	0%	3%	0%
Logistics/capacity to hold exams	1%	4%	0%	0%
Other	12%	12%	8%	23%
None of the above	28%	6%	40%	17%
Don't know	*%	0%	0%	2%

~prompted responses, the rest are unprompted

Q18, all respondents, bases shown in table

General Further Education colleges

In more detail, the most commonly reported change amongst these providers was a significant increase in demand for GCSE courses coupled with a clearer focus upon GCSE delivery. For example, one college reported an increase in maths GCSE enrolments from 150 learners in 2013/14 to 780 in 2014/15. A second college reported registering an additional 1,300 learners for maths and English in the 2014/15 academic year, whilst a third reported 'well over 1,500' additional maths and English students.

As a result of increasing demand for GCSE maths and English, four colleges reported having to significantly restructure their teaching provision, including converting previous numeracy, literacy and Functional Skills courses and ceasing to offer courses such as

ESOL in order to reallocate teaching staff. One college responded to the increased demand by outsourcing GCSE provision to other providers.

In terms of provision generally, colleges reported increased coherence in their learning offers. One college introduced clearer career pathways from Study Programmes to higher-level courses. One college had a notable decrease in adult learning provision and an increase in 16-19 provision. Another college reported seeing a decrease in the number of 16-18 year-old learners working towards Level 3 qualifications. One college implemented an additional course – ‘Progression 2’ – as an ‘extension’ module that was specifically targeted towards supporting learners to achieve in maths and English. A further college reported having to reduce their vocational qualification offer in order to accommodate the increased focus upon maths and English.

Recruitment and retraining of staff was significantly changed for many colleges. Five colleges reported recruiting additional tutors to deliver maths and English GCSE courses. A further five colleges reported widespread retraining and/or up-skilling of existing tutors to either enable them to teach GCSE courses or to more effectively embed maths and English into vocational pathways. Three colleges both recruited new staff and up-skilled existing staff in order to support GCSE delivery. A further college reported recruiting internal assessors and subject coordinators to facilitate the transition from alternative provision to GCSE. This type of behaviour is reflected across FE Colleges more generally, with 86% of surveyed colleges recruiting and 76% retraining staff.

Private training providers

Responses of private training providers varied significantly. Five providers adopted the GCSE requirements as part of vocational or apprenticeship qualifications. One provider scaled-up their maths, English, and ICT provision and ceased to offer Initial Teacher Training and Text Processing qualifications. They reported that their curriculum had become much more targeted towards maths, English and ICT.

Survey data shows that recruitment and retraining of staff was a common change for these providers. 44% of providers reported recruiting, whilst 51% retrained staff. In qualitative interviews, four providers stated that they had made staff changes specifically to support the delivery of GCSE maths and English. One provider recruited additional qualified tutors, two invested heavily in refreshing and improving the skills of their existing staff through Continued Professional Development, and one encouraged staff who already held Level 2 qualifications in maths and English to refresh their skills.

Four private training providers reported making no changes to their provision, curriculum, or staff as a result of the reforms. One stated that this was because they had already made changes to their curriculum which meant that they were in compliance with the reforms. This had included converting their maths and English provision to GCSEs. Two

providers reported that they had changed their recruitment and selection processes in order to avoid recruiting learners with D grades. A further provider reported that their partner organisations had made similar changes in recruitment practices. Two providers reported changing their marketing techniques to target learners who had grades above a C or below an E. One provider reported diversifying their apprenticeship programme so that they now offer Level 2 apprenticeships in both hairdressing and IT.

‘Other’ providers

‘Other’ training providers reported changes that resulted in a greater emphasis upon maths and English within their learning offers. These changes included one provider that embedded GCSE syllabi into existing programmes as a fundamental element. A further provider reported an increase in accredited maths and English courses, accompanied by a decrease in non-accredited alternative courses. This shift in focus may account for the fact that, in survey, 63% of ‘other’ training providers reported recruiting additional staff and 48% reported retraining their existing workforce.

In terms of learner demand, ‘other’ providers reported a general increase in maths and English enrolments. One provider reported seeing an increase in the number of unemployed learners and of learners working less than thirty hours a week. The same provider also saw a decrease in the number of learners who worked over thirty hours a week.

One ‘other’ provider reported moving away from a direct-delivery model to a subcontracting model. They reported that they now subcontract 100% of their learning provision to a local FE College. In addition, they also reported focusing their learning offer on key growth areas targeted by the local authority.

Why changes were made

General FE colleges

Many changes in FE college provision were made simply in order to accommodate the increased demand for GCSE maths and English. With maths and English achievement now a condition of funding, colleges accepted that teaching and learning provision need to reflect this focus.

FE colleges were broadly supportive of the principles of the GCSE maths and English reforms. A number recognise that these are skill areas that need to be improved and they support the continuing focus on maths and English:

'I completely agree that everybody should study Maths and English until they're eighteen and that we should have a good programme for adults who can't read and write properly, or mathematics.' (General FE College)

'I respect the concentration on Maths and English because I think that is what's holding our young people back...' (General FE College)

Thus, the changes to provision that focused learning offers on more robust maths and English qualifications were motivated by a general agreement with the purpose and intent of the reforms. However, a number of providers also voiced reservations about the appropriateness of GCSEs. One provider discussed a mismatch between the intent of the reforms and the outcomes of implementing even a revised GCSE programme in further education:

'It's a good thing. We all agree that everybody who hasn't got GCSEs should be doing those. I think most of us also recognise the current qualifications are not fit for purpose.' (General FE College)

Another college noted that, whilst GCSE grade C is generally a positive ambition for all learners to have, the qualification alone does not always guarantee a useful level of skill. Through their initial and diagnostic assessment procedures, this college found that learners who *had* achieved C grades at GCSE were often still unable to demonstrate basic levels of competency in applied numeracy and literacy. This finding led to the college having reservations about the long-term applicability of GCSE qualifications, particularly to those learners who wished to progress into a vocational area:

'It's a proxy approach, which I don't think does what it's supposed to do, but we had to do it ... I know that some of the students were not at all happy at having to immediately come into college and then, you know, get five or six hours a week of re-sit English or maths GCSE.' (General FE College)

Concerns that GCSE qualifications may not always be suitable for learners were particularly marked for those colleges which offered considerable numbers of vocational qualifications. There was also recognition that a redesign of the GCSE curriculum could have wide ranging and perhaps unanticipated effects:

'Redesigning GCSE qualifications is also very important, and they have the potential to have adverse impact that hasn't necessarily been considered ... the reintroduction of some of the less usable complex maths in the GCSE, then what that will do, effectively, is make the GCSE unpassable for many students. Actually much of that content is stuff that they would never use in their life anyway.' (General FE College)

Another college highlighted the fact that GCSEs represent a repetition of material with which learners had not previously succeeded. This was echoed by a further FE college which claimed that the requirement for learners with grade D to enrol on GCSE courses was *'the biggest line of madness I've ever seen in my life ... If kids have spent four years failing at something, what's the point in doing the same thing again?'* Furthermore, one FE college considered that some learners may plateau below a grade C and *'the expectation, if the school system has failed them, that they come here and within a year they're going to get both maths and English GCSE is complete nonsense'*. One college suggested that a more appropriate solution would be *'a contextualised adult type GCSE'* programme that allows learners to develop skills within their vocational area but is markedly different from the GCSE course currently offered.

Two colleges experienced challenges with delivering maths and English GCSEs at the same time as vocational qualifications. One college found that many learners were not able to complete their GCSEs in the same time frame as their vocational qualifications. To address this, the college introduced the 'Progression 2' course to allow learners extra time to complete their GCSEs. This course was *'centred around Maths and English, at the core, with vocational units around it'*. This additional time gave both tutors and learners more flexibility, but extended the learners' course of study, which in turn affected their progression into further education, training or employment.

A second college found that the focus on maths and English as a condition of funding significantly detracted from the amount of time they were able to devote to vocational qualifications. They report that they *'had to devote more resource'* to maths and English, including increased guided learning hours, more staff, and more robust administrative structures to support the GCSEs. As a result they reported having less time, staff and capability to deliver vocational qualifications. Their vocational offer has decreased as a result of this.

Another significant challenge to the delivery of GCSEs was the lack of trained staff, particularly maths teachers and other experts who are able to support and assess tutors as they begin delivering GCSEs:

'Getting hold of experts is difficult ... The other real difficulty is, and I haven't been able to change it because we just don't have the funding, to change the profile of the staff at this college's role, in that there are far too many full-time, permanent lecturers, and not enough trainer assessors or support staff to be able to be more flexible in the delivery of the curriculum.'
(General FE College)

To overcome this challenge, 86% of surveyed colleges recruited staff, and 76% retrained existing staff. Two colleges found difficulties with recruitment and invested in Continued Professional Development as an alternative. They did so by reviewing the current skills of their Functional Skills teachers, looking at examples of best practice and creating their

own routes of *'conversion and professional development for our own teachers'*. Several colleges had converted existing numeracy, literacy or Functional Skills provision to GCSE maths and English, and had also had to retrain existing staff in order to facilitate this move. Two colleges retrained existing staff *and* recruited new specialist tutors.

This action was felt to be necessary in order to properly embed maths and English GCSE within vocational training and to ensure that tutors were adequately supported to deliver GCSE programmes in limited timescales. Some colleges reported that part of the motivation for training existing staff was to avoid the increasingly competitive recruitment process; and one college reported that subcontracting GCSE provision to other providers was the result of budget cuts that prevented them from running the courses themselves.

A number of other colleges also reported that it had been difficult to get high calibre teachers to teach GCSE inside a college environment. One college had experienced logistical and practical difficulties up-skilling their existing tutors, and a further college had experienced difficulties relating the GCSE syllabus to vocational areas such as health and beauty or construction. They feel that, in this respect, Functional Skills qualifications are more adaptable and appropriate.

Private training providers

Some changes made by private providers were motivated by changes in the behaviour of other training organisations. One provider reported significantly altering their provision in response to the changed behaviour of a local FE college. According to the provider, the local college takes all GCSE learners in the area but experiences a large drop-out at around week seven. The provider adapted their provision to accommodate these learners on a lower-level maths and English qualification. As a result, they have focused their provision in this area to accommodate this seasonal increase in available learners.

The same provider also reports altering their provision in light of recent welfare reforms. They reported that they have begun to work more closely with the local authority in order to maximise their funding streams. They have also tried to build stronger relationships with the local Jobcentre in order to build a 'learner pool' of jobseekers and have *'adapted our ICT beginners course in light of the needs of Jobseekers, the welfare reforms'*. The provider states that this is partly a response to *'the reduction in funding'* and an attempt to provide cost-effective education and training that is of the most value to the local community. It is partly, however, a recognition of the need to diversify the organisation:

'The key thing that we're trying to act now is to diversify as an organisation and it might be that learning is not the primary aim of the organisation further down the road. We still want to be teaching and educating people but it might be in a different guise to what it currently is. So it might be

we're exploring things like workplace assessments and coaching and mentoring and even additional sessions for school kids.' (Private Provider)

In the view of this provider, the reforms as a whole are motivating reconsideration of the focus and direction of the organisation. The changes already implemented represent the beginning of this process, but the provider remains broadly supportive of the reforms, and of maths and English reform in particular. Other private training providers made no changes to their provision as they were already delivering the required maths and English qualifications to their learners. These training providers were also generally positive with regard to the maths and English reforms, acknowledging the value of GCSE qualifications and supporting the aim of up-skilling trainees and apprentices.

Four providers interviewed in depth invested in the skills of their staff – this was also reported by 51% of private training providers in the quantitative survey, reflecting a general trend towards up-skilling tutors and trainers. Providers report having made use of the Maths Enhancement Programme to prepare their current staff for GCSE delivery, preparing resources made available through the Virtual Learning Environment and organising workshops as part of the Continued Professional Development of staff. With GCSE delivery in mind, CPD extended to those tutors who already held Level 2 qualifications in maths and English as they were encouraged to refresh and update their knowledge and skills. One college felt that this had helped them to enhance their maths and English delivery streams to accommodate the reforms.

Recruitment and retention of staff was noted by one provider as a distinct issue. In survey, 44% of providers recruited in the light of the FE reform programme, and several reported making redundancies in some areas to compensate for the increased recruitment required to deliver maths and English courses. One provider noted that the '*constant churn of teachers*' through the training sector is a challenge to providers trying to provide continuity. It is also a financial challenge for providers who are operating on tight budgets.

One provider which recruited found it relatively easy to recruit skilled tutors. They attributed this to their network of contacts, which has enabled them to reach qualified and skilled tutors outside of mainstream recruitment channels. In order to balance the requirement for maths and English tutors, the provider had looked at ways to become more cost-effective, such as sourcing cheaper stationary and making use of innovative technology to streamline processes where possible. They had also downsized their premises in order to reduce overhead costs.

Some training providers altered their recruitment practices to take into account the requirement for those learners with a grade D to be automatically enrolled on GCSE programmes. This depended on the size of the provider, with smaller organisations being heavily imposed upon by the logistical and practical barriers to offering GCSEs. One

provider, for example, noted that the requirement of having a lockable safe, bolted to the floor in a room of specific dimensions was not always achievable for small training providers. Similarly, very small providers may not have high enough numbers to achieve awarding body status and so taking on GCSE qualifications was not cost-effective for them.

As a result of the perceived inability to accommodate learners who were required to enrol on GCSE programmes, two providers report altering recruitment practices to target learners who had either a Grade C or higher, or a Grade E or lower. This allowed the provider to avoid enrolling learners who would need to take GCSE programmes. Conversely, another provider targeted their marketing specifically at learners with a grade D, so that all learners enrolled would be studying the same programme. This required providers to pre-assess the likelihood of an applicant being able to complete GCSEs in the given time frame. This is perhaps reflected in the data shown in Figure 61 earlier in this chapter, which suggests that no private training providers faced logistical challenges in implementing the maths and English reforms. It would appear that those providers which envisioned challenges of this nature pre-emptively avoided the problem by narrowing recruitment or putting systems in place to accommodate the additional maths and English learners.

Alongside the logistical concerns involved with delivering GCSE maths and English, a number of providers questioned the appropriateness of the GCSE qualifications to learners pursuing an apprenticeship or other vocational qualification. One provider felt that the move towards GCSEs was not necessarily in keeping with their organisation's aims:

'That would take us even more to an academic year type delivery. You know, again, taking us away, possibly, from our set up and our roots in that we were very much put in place originally to respond to employers.' (Private Provider)

The perceived move away from being responsive to the needs of employers is corroborated by the experience of a second provider. Many of the employers with which the provider worked did not hold maths and English qualifications themselves and therefore did not always see the value in apprentices gaining GCSE qualifications. In the words of the training provider....

'It's an unnecessary hoop that we're making people jump through to satisfy someone's idea that it is useful. Now I think that if you go back to the original ethos around NVQ, if maths and English are very important in an occupation, they should be embedded in that standard.' (Private Provider)

A further provider questioned the applicability of GCSE course content to the vocational areas in which learners are training. As they work with childcare apprentices, they feel that GCSEs are not appropriate: *'it's the age-old issue of people shoving academic sensibilities into work-based learning. It's a huge conflict'*. Instead they suggest that apprenticeship standards should be rewritten to properly contextualise and embed English, maths and ICT in a way that is usable within the industry.

The format of the more academic qualifications, including the rigid exam timetable, was perceived by a number of private training providers to be incompatible with vocational courses. The requirements to hold exams at specific points often meant that providers did not have the time to get those with a grade D up to grade C standard. One private provider reported that:

'At the moment, the problem is this GCSE. That is the biggest problem at the moment ... we can prove by the assessment process that GCSEs are not working, not for vocational work ... I think what they've got to do now, the government, is make Functional Skills, Level 2, equivalent to the GCSE.' (Private Provider)

A perception was that the adoption of GCSEs would not only tie the course to an academic timescale but would also render the provider less able to adapt to the needs of employers. Interestingly, however, a number of FE Colleges report enhancing their links with local employers in support of their 16-19 Study Programme, apprenticeship, or Traineeship provision yet no FE colleges reported experiencing negative responses from employers in regard to the maths and English requirements.

For private providers, adoption of GCSEs would also require the provider to either hire new staff or subcontract their maths and English provision to an FE College:

'We would need to recruit people in to teach GCSE maths and English. We would then be another provider fishing in a small pool of available people, I think it's particularly maths teachers who are hard to come by. You know, we've got people that can deliver Functional Skills and deliver Functional Skills well, but they're not GCSE maths and English teachers.' (Private Provider)

Whilst some providers recruited and retrained their staff to aid delivery of GCSE programmes, others were restricted by budgets, enrolment numbers or other practicalities.

‘Other’ training providers

The increased focus on maths and English was considered by one ‘other’ provider to arise from their general agreement with the need to improve skills in these areas:

‘The positive is that it’s something that we want to promote anyway ... I think it’s really raising the skills level and it’s a skill that I think most people need.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

Other providers reported that they adopted the reforms because they felt that the changes would be successful and because they had witnessed the wider social benefits of improving maths and English skills. One comment was:

‘Where we are using it at its best is in schools, because we’re using it as a delivery to the adults who can then support their children, as well as using it as a means of securing their own skill level, and progressing into employment.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

For another provider, the reduction in the scope of courses they are able to offer was motivated both by the perceived need to refocus on GCSE maths and English but also by perceived funding restrictions. Providers have seen a marked increase in learners seeking maths and English qualifications and this was attributed by one provider to the increased focus on these skills brought about by the reforms. They had found that, as demand for maths and English courses increased, they often had more learners enrolling than their reduced Adult Skills Budget could support. This was reflected by another provider who noted that *‘what we’re finding is there is less and less money to do more and more work’*. This was perceived to be due to a combination of financial changes in several areas, including 24+ Advanced Learning Loans, 16-19 Study Programme funding, and Adult Skills Budget allocations.

A provider that reported moving to a 100% subcontracting model of delivery discussed the reasons behind this move. Although not attributed to the FE reforms in isolation, they nevertheless reported that the FE reforms to maths and English, Study Programmes and apprenticeships motivated their move away from direct delivery. The provider reported that:

‘We no longer want to employ staff that directly deliver training. We are focussing on having teams of people who can contract manage, procure, and commission other providers. We don’t employ people who are qualified trainers, or who are qualified in IV Qualifications, or delivering literacy and numeracy.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

This change was enacted in order to better align the provider with the needs of the local authority. The local authority was moving towards targeting specific growth markets – IT,

engineering and sectors that support the growth of a low carbon and environmental economy – and the provider followed suit in order to *‘make our learning offer more economy-related’*.

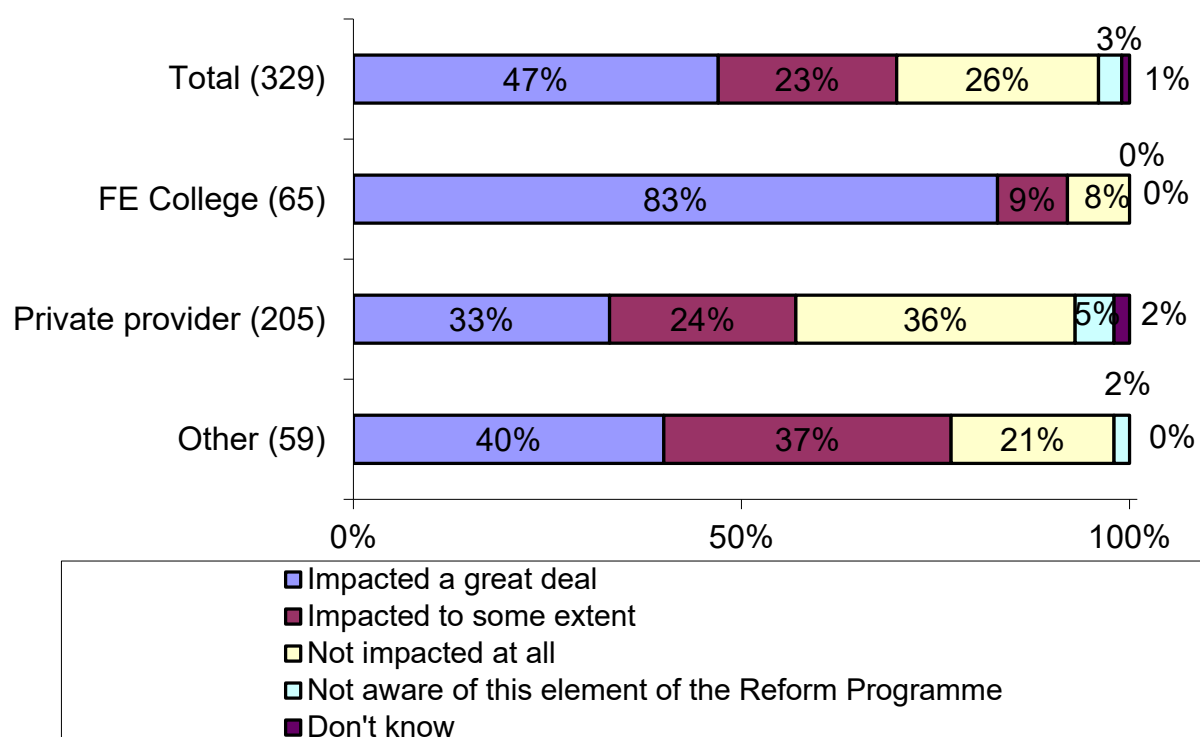
The provider subcontracted their provision to a local FE college as it was felt that the college would have structures in place to deliver the training and recruit adequate numbers of learners, as well as delivering the maths and English component.

Perceived impact of the changes

In survey, FE providers were asked how the requirement to ensure learners with a grade D or below in maths and English continue studying for GCSEs in these subjects has impacted on their organisation. The vast majority of respondents were aware of this requirement, with only 3% reporting that they were unaware of this reform. A quarter (26%) said it had not impacted on their organisation at all. [Qualitative evidence suggests that this is due to a range of reasons including: the provider was already delivering provision that conformed with the requirements; the provider had an existing sub-contracting arrangement that accommodated the changes; the provider altered learner recruitment practices in order to avoid having to make drastic changes to their provision.] Private providers were more likely to report having felt no impact from this reform (36%), whilst FE Colleges were least likely to report this outcome (8%).

Seven in ten of all providers (70%) reported at least some impact, of which the majority (47%) reported that it has impacted on their organisation a great deal (**Figure 62**). FE colleges were considerably more likely than private providers to report that it has impacted a great deal (83%, compared with 33%).

Figure 63: Extent to which the requirement to ensure learners who have not achieved a C or above in Maths and English GCSEs continue studying for GCSEs in these subjects has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_3, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

General FE colleges

In more detail, the increased demand for maths and English GCSE in general FE colleges has led to several wide ranging impacts. Firstly, nearly all colleges have recognised the need for more tutors who are qualified and experienced to deliver maths and English GCSE programmes. Recognition of this has been motivated by several factors including: acceptance of the focus on GCSEs as benchmark qualifications in maths and English; an understanding of the complex challenges facing tutors delivering time-limited courses; and, the importance of promoting both maths and English skills across all further education courses. Even though a number of colleges felt the changes to maths and English requirements were extensive, they nevertheless accepted the importance of the reforms. One college remarked that *'you can't just fiddle around at the edges. If you've got something like English and maths ... you have to take it seriously'*.

Survey data shows that the need for skilled tutors has been addressed by colleges either through recruitment of new staff (86% of colleges) or development of existing staff (76%). Many colleges have struggled to recruit tutors, with maths tutors being in particularly short supply. This was attributed partly to restricted budgets. One college reported that they attempted to recruit a 'maths champion' to support GCSE delivery across the college but that they were unable to attract applications from suitable candidates given

the budget they had. Nevertheless, investment in staff recruitment and retraining has generally been felt to be beneficial to the consistency of teaching and learning.

One college reported that recruitment drives in the FE sector have increased competition for qualified staff. In turn, this *'has given us a problem because people are able to get jobs elsewhere paid more now where they couldn't before'*. The roles of skilled maths and English teachers are perceived to be more challenging and competition for staff is now greater but there is not always space in institutional budgets to increase wages in line with the increased workload.

The need to recruit tutors is driven by the perception voiced by one college that GCSE content is *'much harder to embed and align with vocational subjects than Functional Skills'*. As a result, colleges not only require tutors with the knowledge to deliver the content but they also need tutors who are experienced at adapting what is seen as a more rigid curriculum to better suit vocational subject areas. This motivated one college to offer CPD activities to vocational tutors as well as maths and English tutors. This was felt to better enable vocational staff to properly embed maths and English into vocational programmes.

Several other colleges had implemented CPD courses for staff ranging from in-house workshops to formal Level 2 maths and English qualifications. One college reported that the increased focus on staff development led to a 'staff amnesty' that allowed those with skills gaps to come forward without fear of negative consequences. Another college reported that emphasising CPD for existing staff had enacted a shift in staff culture from a focus on vocational abilities to wider teaching and learning skills that can help the delivery of maths and English. This college also reorganised their staff structure in order to designate lead tutors for both maths and English. These roles were intended to impress upon learners the need for maths and English skills and to highlight the applicability of those skills to different vocational areas.

One college had recognised the ongoing nature of the demand for maths and English tutors and had put in place a pipeline to help increase the supply of qualified tutors. This was driven, in part, by the college's recognition of the fact that most tutors *'will work with us and move on, and we know that there's going to be an ongoing and continuing demand'*.

One college responded to challenges in staffing by developing a network across their sites and partner organisations that encouraged staff to share best practice. They created staff sub-groups focusing specifically on maths and English to help support staff to deliver the GCSEs:

'We have a range of subgroups where key leads from the five or six different colleges in the area meet together to share best practice. We've

got one of these around quality and Maths and English has been a particular focus there in terms of sharing expertise.’ (General FE College)

Whilst there had been a significant recruitment drive for Maths and English tutors, some colleges noted significant numbers of redundancies as teaching teams and management were restructured and budgets amended. A small number of colleges acknowledged that some of these redundancies stemmed from acquisitions and mergers, which were reported as becoming more frequent following the FE Reform programme.

One college noted a reduction in the numbers of 16-18 year-old learners working towards Level 3 qualifications. They attributed this change to the raised participation age and the establishment of more sixth form colleges. The provider was of the opinion that sixth form colleges are *‘creaming off ... the best learners’* in order to maximise their success rates and funding streams. This reflects the opinion, expressed by several colleges and some private training providers, that the FE sector increasingly finds itself compensating for the underperformance of schools. One college had the view that:

‘I think the fundamental flaw is obviously kids not getting the maths and English before they leave school, A-C, and I think it is about the whole maths and English priority within school and the teachers teaching those subjects, which then does have a knock-on effect in colleges.’ (General FE College)

Another college further attributed some of the challenges in delivering GCSE maths and English to the previous experiences and motivation of learners:

‘Many of those students have done badly at maths and English at school and really struggle to motivate themselves to reengage with this at college. So, getting that message across loud and clear is hard for them to hear, when they thought they’d got away from it by coming to college.’ (General FE College)

This was echoed by another college which noted that some learners had dropped out of study programmes because of the maths and English requirements. This was attributed to a variety of reasons, but it was particularly noted by one college that many learners do not expect to have to continue to studying for maths and English. This suggests that Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services may not be briefing learners fully on the requirements of Study Programmes, apprenticeships and other pathways. Indeed, one college reported a lack of IAG offered to school leavers and subsequently enhanced their own IAG services offered to learners at open days and on enrolment.

One college also pointed out that many vocational learners who were made aware of the maths and English requirement find it difficult to understand *why* that requirement is in place, particularly when they are following non-academic vocational pathways:

'I know that some of the students were not at all happy at having to immediately come into college and then, you know, get five or six hours a week of re-sit English and maths.' (General FE College)

The college went on to suggest that it is more difficult to embed GCSE content than other numeracy or literacy qualifications into practical vocational courses. Further, they reported that the focus on maths and English, including increased timetabled hours for those subjects, has meant they had less available time and resource to devote to the vocational subjects that constitute the learner's main learning aim.

This contributed to a sense amongst FE colleges that the expectations of learners are not being met by the requirement for those with grade D to be enrolled on GCSE programmes to obtain a grade C. Moreover, some colleges considered this particular requirement to be an example of the FE sector being penalised for the underperformance of schools. One provider suggested that:

'The funding conditionality means that we don't get any funding for any learner programme unless they're enrolled on maths and English. It feels like we're being penalised for schools' failures. There's been a lot of bad feeling about all of that.' (General FE College)

This conditionality has caused the college to try and enforce attendance by going to *'get the learners and take them to lessons'*. However, they have still experienced *'13% of people not turning up to the Maths GCSE exam'*. Another college reported that some learners may purposefully be aiming to achieve lower grades on their GCSE examinations than they are capable of. As a result, a further college reports that they have *'a lot of learners that we are not going to get any funding for'* because they have not completed all the funding requirements.

This contributes to the perception of some colleges that:

'As a sector, we're being set up to fail ... we're told off if we can't get those grade Ds up to a grade C, but grade D might be the highest that those young people can achieve.' (General FE College)

One college reported experiencing challenges in timetabling, and marketing of the learning offer that arose from a perceived lack of learner motivation. To tackle this issue, the college adopted a greater focus on why learners need GCSE skills when studying vocational subjects.

The perception that colleges have to cope with large numbers of unmotivated learners gives rise to the notion that colleges need excellent teachers, which has driven recruitment for many colleges. However, one college reported that many learners go to college to progress onto higher-level or specialist courses and argued that:

'You can have the best teacher in the world delivering that maths lesson, but the kids want to do the new subject ... If they're wanting to do an A-level or vocational area, they want to focus on that, not things that they feel they should have done before.' (General FE College)

In survey, over a third (37%) of FE Colleges reported motivation as a significant challenge to the implementation of the maths and English reforms – this was considerably higher than either private providers (7%) or 'other' providers (6%). This disparity may be due to the differences in learner numbers – many colleges interviewed reported having between 200 and 2,000 additional maths and English registrations, a figure which often exceeded private and 'other' training providers' entire cohort – or, as recognised by at least one college, inadequacies in pre-enrolment IAG services in schools, colleges and other advice centres.

Alongside staffing issues, several colleges also noted that learners are now taking more accredited courses but they are taking longer to complete them because of the Maths and English requirements. This observation caused one college to create a 'Progression 2' course that enabled learners to finish their maths and English qualifications following the completion of their vocational course. Another college noted a large shift from unlisted qualifications to accredited qualifications, and claimed that this had *'a significant depressing effect on our success rates'*, which currently stand at around 60% of learners achieving their Maths and English.

A number of colleges reported that the initial freedoms of the reforms have been eroded by increasingly specific targets in, for example, maths and English. *'So the freedoms that we had were soon eroded because we had a reducing budget, had to be targeted at apprenticeships and Maths and English, and we still had to give off a bunch to our full-time learners'*.

One college noted that a significant impact of the FE reforms in general, and particularly the focus upon maths and English, is that colleges are becoming more aware of other colleges' learning offers. Maths and English requirements in particular were felt to have placed more pressure on colleges to become more effective and efficient in their delivery and to provide a higher-quality service to their learners. One particular college had looked to its competitors and also local partner organisations to assess strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the learning offers. They had also looked into developing partnerships with businesses and schools in order to look into ways to prepare learners

for further education or training so that some of the pressure is taken from the college. This was particularly motivated by the increased numbers of learners enrolling for GCSE maths and English when they arrive at the college, and the staffing pressures experienced by the college.

Private training providers

A number of private training providers refocused their provision on maths and English, at both Functional Skills and GCSE level. In survey, 44% of private providers reported investing in recruitment of tutors to deliver these aspects to ensure quality in teaching and learning but many found that they had to compromise in other areas to remain within budget. As a result, one provider downsized their premises and streamlined costs and processes to become more cost-efficient. This further motivated the provider to investigate more cost-effective programmes, including extending partnerships with the local authority and Jobcentre Plus.

Some private providers reported increases in demand for accredited maths and English courses. One provider reported that this was partly due to the altered behaviour of a local FE college. As the college took on all GCSE learners in the area, it experienced a high-rate of drop-outs around week seven. As a result, the private provider was able to take on a large number of learners who wished to take maths and English qualifications below GCSE level. The provider responded by scaling up their Functional Skills provision and removing other courses from their offer.

Just under half of the private providers who spoke about the maths and English reforms in qualitative interviews had not implemented any changes. These training providers were more likely to report that these reforms had little impact upon them. One provider said that the Maths and English reforms were among the least important because they saw them as inappropriate for the apprenticeship schemes they ran and they were *'waiting for it to go away'*. This attitude was partly informed by the reactions of the employers that the provider worked with and partly informed by the provider believing the timescale for achieving Maths and English in post-16 training was unrealistic. The provider asks....

'When schools have had them from the age of five to sixteen or seventeen, or maybe eighteen now, what on Earth makes them think that we should pick them up, and some of ours complete in eighteen months, and change the world?' (Private Provider)

For some private providers who have taken note of the reforms, they have been unable to fully implement them due to time or budget constraints. As one provider discussed: *'We can only do one of two things in the grade D situation. Either we look to subcontract that out to a local college, or we are unable to help that individual'*. This was a situation

experienced by several private providers and it had prompted a number to alter their marketing and recruitment practices. Increasingly, providers were recruiting learners who they are confident can achieve in maths and English, which results in some learners not advancing in their chosen vocation beyond Level 1 or 2. One provider stated that: *'we probably turn down ten learners a year because they can't go on to their advanced apprenticeship. Just because of the maths and English'*.

One small private training provider discussed learner reactions to the maths and English GCSE requirements. In particular, they expressed concern that when faced with careers advice that tells them they will have to retake their GCSEs, learners will decide not to pursue further education. Although currently unquantifiable, the provider worried that the number of young people not in education, employment or training may rise over the next few years.

This was echoed by a further training provider which reported the impact of the maths and English reforms on their retention and achievement rates. For this particular provider, learner performance was affected by the pressure to achieve GCSE qualifications in short timescales. The provider noted the: *'sheer pressure for people who have just come out of education for God knows how many years and have failed. Or have, you know only just failed and now have to face doing that again'*. In this context, the provider was concerned that potential learners will *'just walk away'* and not enter into further training. This was supported by a further provider's concern that *'the GCSE is completely putting off the learners coming'*. One provider reported fifteen cases of learners not taking up training *'because they're terrified of failing maths and English GCSE again'*.

Another provider was concerned that the practicalities of offering provision to 16-19 year-olds in particular was detrimental to the diversity of the learner population. The provider noted:

'The learners that aren't as able that need a more flexible programme that's not qualification-driven at first, are the ones that are going to lose out. If you think about Apprenticeships now, a lot of Apprenticeship providers won't take them unless they've got grade A-C, even though that's not a requirement of the frameworks. It's again, at the bottom end, the ones that are getting squeezed out.' (Private Provider)

This is further reflected by two other providers that reported having altered their learner recruitment practices. One aimed to recruit learners who do not need to enrol on GCSE programmes as they feel unable to deliver these courses. Conversely, the other aimed to recruit only those learners who *do* need to enrol on GCSE programmes in order to make sure all learners study the same maths and English programme. This type of selection was reported to have resulted in providers refusing to accept learners who were significantly below the required level or those with additional learning needs. One

provider reflected that, *'in a way, all the establishments or the hierarchies in this, are working against the interests of some of the more deprived kids, if you like'*.

Another training provider discussed the effects of the GCSE requirements on learners who do enrol on further training. They found that some learners were prevented from advancing from Level 1 or 2 in their vocational subject because they were unable to achieve the Maths and English requirements:

'I mean, I've had five learners with me, who were eighteen-year-olds, they'd failed their GCSEs once, they'd gone to college to do a level two programme with GCSEs in there, they'd failed them again. They'd finished their level two programme at college. The college wouldn't allow them to go onto a level three programme because they hadn't got level two in maths and English, so they were thrown out of college. Where do they go then?'
(Private Provider)

There is an overarching uncertainty regarding the practicalities of the qualifications, as one provider questioned how, *'if schools can't get a young person through a GCSE in two years, how can we get them through a GCSE in one year?'*

'Other' training providers

'Other' training providers experienced increased demand for accredited maths and English courses. As a result, a number of providers refocused their learning offer in these areas. One result was that some providers narrowed their curriculum offer in order to concentrate on these areas. This was attributed by one provider to the increased teaching and administration demands for maths and English syllabi compared to unaccredited or Functional Skills qualifications. The same provider also noted, however, that funding restraints had limited their ability to provide a range of courses as *'what we're finding is there is less and less money to do more and more work'*.

One training provider reported that GCSE examinations are not timed well for use with work-based learning programmes:

'The timing of the GCSE exams as well they're always going to be on a set date in June every year. That works alright when you're in a school or a college environment. But it's a big barrier that the system is putting up for us. Sometimes you might have a young person who might join a course of study at a midpoint in a year, you're at a point in the year where the exam's not very far away. They're then going have to wait another year before they can fit that in. The timing of it is horrible.' ('Other' Provider)

The provider suggested that more flexibility in the timing of the exam would better suit learners who start at different times, or learners who are studying in work-based environments.

One training provider both narrowed their learning offer and (as noted elsewhere) began subcontracting all of their provision to a local FE college. Since selecting the subcontractor, however, the provider has been dissatisfied with their performance. One particular issue was that the subcontractor was failing to find adequate work experience placements for the learners. The training provider was considering their options for changing subcontractor. However, they felt that the maths and English requirement was preventing them from considering other, smaller partner organisations. They report that the need to deliver maths and English to GCSE level *'makes me think, 'Oh God, do I really want to pull the contract? Do I really want to go to a smaller firm?' The likelihood of them having someone who's qualified to deliver maths and English at this level is slim'*. As a result, the provider feels *'stuck where we are'* and although this is not due solely to the maths and English reforms, they remain influential to their situation.

FE Reform English and Maths Case Studies

Introduction

Six case studies with FE providers were undertaken. The studies explore how providers are implementing reforms requiring all learners aged 16-19, and those on the Early Years Apprenticeship framework, with a GCSE grade D in English and/or maths to continue to work towards these qualifications as part of their study programme. For each case study in depth interviews were conducted with up to ten key members of staff and stakeholders who had been involved in, or were aware of, the implementation process for the reforms. The case study summaries are available in Appendix 4.

The purpose of the case studies is to:

- Understand the changes made and in what context to implement the reforms
- Consider the perceived impact of the reforms on learning providers
- Outline elements of the reforms requiring further consideration by providers and policy makers

The providers studied had previously taken part in a call for evidence consultation for BIS about the new English and maths GCSEs.⁴⁰ Following up the participants for these cases

⁴⁰ Robey, C., Jones, E. and Stevenson, A. (2014) New English and maths GCSEs in Post-16 Education and Skills: Findings of the call for evidence undertaken on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Education. BIS. London

studies enabled an examination of how views about implementing the reforms may have changed over time.

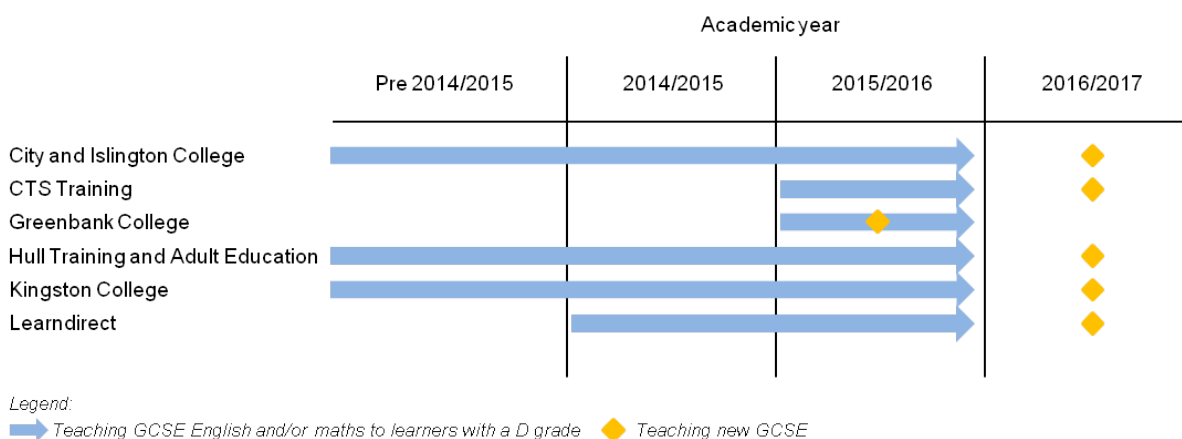
The six case studies cover a variety of providers as illustrated in the table below. The providers differed by type, size and location. The spread of providers enables the identification of what works, for whom, and in what circumstances.

Profile of Case Study Providers

Name	Type	Size	Region
City and Islington College	General	Large	South East
CTS Training	Private	Large	Yorkshire and Humber
Greenbank College	Specialist	Small	North West
Hull Training and Adult Education	Local authority	Large	Yorkshire and Humber
Kingston College	General	Large	South East
learndirect	Private	Large	National

The following figure indicates that the six providers studied also differ in terms of when reforms have been/are implemented. Several providers trialled the teaching of GCSE English and/or maths to at least some of their learners with a grade D before it became a condition of funding in August 2015. CTS Training and Greenbank College will start teaching this qualification this year. Greenbank College has also chosen to introduce the new GCSE at the same time whereas the other providers are waiting until August 2016.

When reforms were implemented by case study providers



Actions Taken

Actions varied depending on providers existing learning offer, but all providers took some action in response to the GCSE English and maths reforms. Many actions focused upon improving the quality of teaching and learning in support of GCSE delivery. Nearly all case study providers recruited more staff and/or engaged existing staff in enhanced Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities. Private training providers reported taking action in order to mitigate logistical difficulties associated with their current delivery models. One Other Training Provider reported developing links with their Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in order to obtain funding to deliver a wider programme of skills development to the regional workforce.

The actions taken by the six case study providers fall broadly into four areas: actions that affect teaching; actions that affect learning; actions that affect management or administration; and, actions that affect external stakeholders, including employers, awarding organisations and other training providers.

Teaching

Three FE Colleges – one specialist and two general – were interviewed as part of the case studies and all three reported focusing actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning in relation to English and maths GCSE provision. City and Islington College introduced a more robust recruitment and performance management process. This has brought in more stringent requirements for CPD for existing staff, along with increased CPD provision. Kingston College have likewise developed their teaching team by appointing Team Leaders for English and maths. They have also encouraged English and maths specialists to deliver CPD training to vocational tutors to support the embedding of English and maths in other courses. Specialist provider Greenbank College recruited tutors to increase their capacity to teach English and maths using government recruitment grants where possible. They also reorganised the teaching team so that the tutors teach similar level learners across both GCSE and Functional Skills courses.

Of the two private training providers interviewed one, CTS Training, also focused on ensuring that dedicated teaching staff were in post to support the delivery of GCSEs. Two specialist roles for suitably qualified tutors were created. The second, **learndirect**, focused on actions affecting the structure of their teaching provision. They found it necessary to deviate from their distance and online learning models by sending printed materials to learners in preparation for the assessments, as GCSE test papers are currently not available online. In addition, they also had to locate and rent controlled assessment centres that were able to meet the security requirements for the GCSE examinations.

Hull Training and Adult Education, a local authority provider, appointed a Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Lead for English and one for maths. They also recruited

a maths graduate using the government's incentive scheme. The TLA Leads were instrumental in the continued development of the teaching team through setting benchmarks for GCSE delivery. Staff also attended the English and Maths Enhancement Programmes run by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF).

Learning

Of the colleges interviewed, City and Islington have implemented maths workshops to offer further support to learners. Kingston College have also established maths workshops that run each week and provide learners with the opportunity to get further support with GCSE or Functional Skills maths courses. They have also invested in resources, such as the Maths Watch resource pack, which have been made available in every classroom. Finally, Greenbank College have scaled-up the teaching of English and maths GCSEs and put support mechanisms, including quiet rooms for studying, in place to support learners who may find the transition from Functional Skills to GCSEs more challenging.

Private training provider CTS Training have changed the structure of their learning offer in order to meet the conditions of funding. This includes starting learners on both English and maths courses as soon as they enrol, and scheduling English and maths classes to run simultaneously to ensure that learners achieve in both subjects. This was done to give the organisation the best chance of securing funding in case the learner abandons the course before its end; a high risk for their customer profile. They also reviewed the levels of their vocational courses, matching the GCSE programme with appropriate Level 2 vocational and developmental courses where Level 1 alternatives had previously been delivered.

learndirect, on the other hand, have made changes to their recruitment and initial assessment procedures. They have developed a diagnostic tool for English and maths and prospective learners will have to meet a minimum level of competence in order to be accepted onto the Apprenticeship. **learndirect** also found it necessary to locate and rent exam centres that will accept their learners; these are often schools and colleges as they comply with the security requirements of GCSE assessment centres.

Hull Training and Adult Education have been offering GCSE English and maths to a small selection of learners for the past three years. They continue to offer this provision to learners who have completed their Level 2 Functional Skills and wish to progress further.

Management and Administration

In addition to improving the quality of its teaching, City and Islington College took action at a managerial level to support the delivery of GCSE English and maths. They employed senior staff to oversee the quality of teaching and this directly led to enhanced recruitment and CPD processes. The College also invested in their information

management system, which is allowing them to gather data from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) more efficiently.

Kingston College also supported their GCSE English and maths delivery by expanding its support staff to include attendance monitors and a data analyst to track and monitor progress. They have also established an English and Maths Forum which brings together staff from across departments to share best practice and develop learning resources.

Both private training providers reported fewer managerial or administrative changes. CTS Training did not report any, as the new roles for English and maths teachers were filled internally. The changes put into action by **learndirect** are the result of having to comply with GCSE assessment and security requirements. **learndirect** have also incurred increased registration and examination fees from the increased number of learners they are putting through GCSE examinations.

Hull Training and Adult Education created a new English and Maths Manager role in response to the reforms to GCSE English and maths. This role supports the delivery of these subjects within adult education and vocational programmes, assisting teaching staff from across the organisation to support the drive towards GCSEs.

External Stakeholders

The case study providers have also addressed their links with external stakeholders, including awarding organisations, employers and other training providers. City and Islington College noted the most extensive action taken in this regard. They began working with the ETF on a maths Graduate scheme, whereby they offer training and mentoring places to trainee teachers. They have strengthened communications with exam boards in order to ensure that tutors had access to GCSE syllabi in order to select the most appropriate course for the distinct learner cohorts they teach. They have also held a forum in association with their chosen awarding body to raise employer awareness of the English and maths requirements for apprentices.

CTS Training did not report taking action in regard to its external stakeholders, whilst **learndirect** have developed their relationship with the awarding organisation they use. They are currently in discussion regarding the logistical issues noted above in the hopes of reaching a compromise between the strict requirements for GCSE examinations and their distance-learning model. In addition, **learndirect** have found that the increased time it takes some learners to complete the English and maths requirements have negatively impacted on their relationship with some employers.

Hull Training and Adult Education have supplemented their CPD programme with a project group on English and maths run in association with the Humber Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This group identified the need to improve the delivery of English and maths across the partnership, and submitted a successful bid to the European Social Fund to develop skills in the regional workforce.

Impact of Actions

The impact of the actions taken in response to the FE reforms covers a range of both internal and external impacts. FE Colleges, for example, have experienced significant increases in their teaching teams, along with subsequent increases in CPD activity. As a result of this expansion, City and Islington College reported a collaborative working ethos developing across its departments, which is in turn helping to embed English and maths into vocational courses. They also report that improvements in the quality of teaching and learning has improved attendance and achievement rates for English and maths, particularly for Apprenticeship students. In contrast, Kingston College have experienced a lull in learners' motivation following the implementation of GCSE delivery, which they note may be linked to a lack of awareness among learners and employers about why learners on vocational pathways are required to sit GCSEs. Greenbank College is not yet able to report the impact of the actions it has taken as many of the changes are being applied from the start of the 2015/16 academic year.

The actions of private training providers have led to a wider variety of impacts.

learndirect's actions since the reforms have resulted in an increase in direct costs associated with assessments. The provider also reports a somewhat negative reaction in their learner cohort to sitting exams in schools or colleges. As many of their learners are older, they find that sitting exams alongside younger learners can lead to a loss of motivation or confidence. **learndirect's** diagnostic tool has resulted in them turning down applications from learners who do not meet the minimum competency level, which is affecting the diversity of the learner cohort. **learndirect** also report that extending the time apprentices take to complete the English and maths requirement is 'putting employers off putting their learners through the [...] Apprenticeship. Employers are saying that they can't wait' as the demand for qualified workers is high. Similarly, the changes made by CTS Training are perceived to have resulted in a re-focusing of resources on English and maths, at the expense of vocational programmes. They report that able learners are sometimes prevented from progressing in their chosen profession because they cannot achieve the English and maths requirements.

Hull Training and Adult Education report that the confidence and skills of teaching staff has greatly improved, which has in turn increased their motivation to engage with the GCSE reforms. This has enabled the organisation to adapt to the needs of the learners as they are able to offer a range of qualifications without compromising quality. Hull Training and Adult Education also experienced a significant strengthening of its relationship with LEP partners, and an improvement in its strategic profile. A successful European Social Fund bid has consequently positioned Hull Training and Education as a key partner in the delivery of skills training to the workforce in the Humber region.

A number of actions taken have yet to result in tangible impacts – **learndirect's** consultation with its awarding organisation, for example, is on-going and the results of the process are as yet unknown. Similarly, City and Islington College's investment in its

information management system and its inclusion in the ETF maths Graduate Trainee scheme are yet to have a tangible impact due to the timescale of their implementation.

Future Considerations

Despite the teaching of English and maths at GCSE level now being a condition of funding for students who have a grade D, it is apparent that across the six providers studied a number of shared issues remain regarding the implementation of this policy.

Having improved the supply and quality of English and maths tutors in readiness for the changes to funding conditionality, there is still some uncertainty for a number of providers about the level of demand. CTS Training wonder how many students having not attained a grade C will choose to continue their GCSE studies at their organisation rather than other providers. City and Islington College question the extent to which demand will alter once the new GCSE grading was introduced and where the current C/D benchmark would fall.

Many of the providers studied believe there is still a challenge to communicate the importance of gaining a grade C GCSE in English and maths. Both Kingston College and City and Islington College plan to work closely with non-English and maths tutors over the coming year to develop their understanding of the relevance of the subjects to students' other courses and employment prospects. This is to ensure organisation-wide support and encouragement for learners to succeed in these subjects. Kingston College, as well as Hull Training and Adult Education, will also invest time and resources in communicating the benefits of attaining a good GCSE in English and maths to learners and/or their parents. This is to increase learner motivation and engagement with these qualifications.

Several providers identified a number of practical issues about delivering GCSE English and maths rather than Functional Skills within the context of further education which are still unresolved. These include:

- The requirement for official examination centre conditions, such as secure lockers for papers and invigilation. This means some providers are establishing systems and processes for the first time at their own cost;
- Examinations only available on paper in examination centres and not online. This is a challenge for national providers who run online learning models and those who deliver apprenticeships for employers who need to provide apprentices with time off to attend an examination centre away from their employment.
- Examinations only available to be taken twice during the year. This means that learner progress is held back if they have to take an exam before moving onto their next level and the flexibility of roll-on roll-off provision is restricted in order to ensure students have sufficient time to study a course in advance of the exams.

Over the coming year a number of providers, Greenbank College, City and Islington College, and Kingston College, will be reviewing the awarding organisations for the GCSE English and maths qualifications. This is to ensure the syllabi and examinations are suitable to their students and provide the greatest opportunity for attaining a GCSE C grade. The providers will select alternative awarding organisations if necessary

12. Changes to Apprenticeships

Summary of key points

Apprenticeships lie at the heart of the Government's vision for reforming the FE and skills system and encouraging economic growth. By expanding the role of employers in the system, policy makers believe that more robust linkages can be created between apprenticeships and the skills required by the labour market.

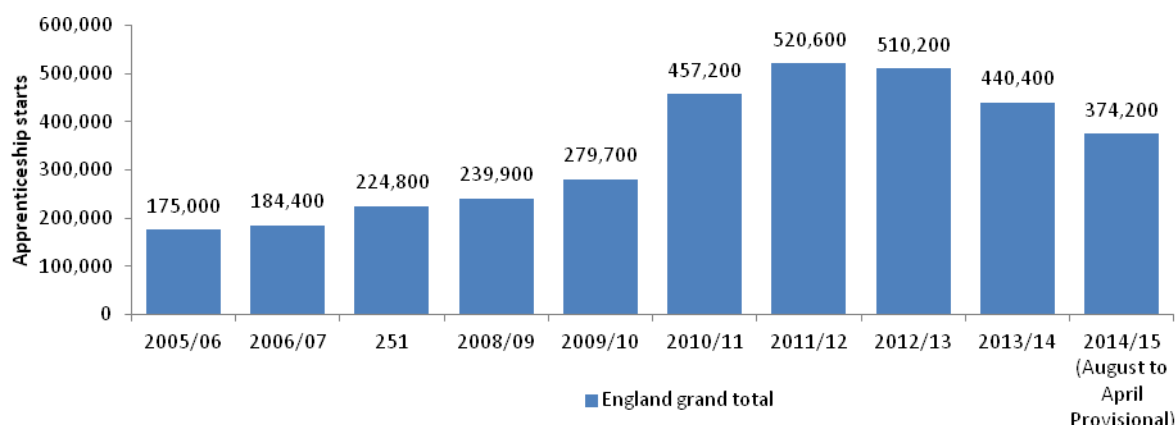
This reform has been successful in delivering a number of key changes. Existing delivery models have been adapted to engage more widely with employers and wider stakeholders (such as LEPs and other local partnerships). Providers have begun to think about how to strategically improve learning quality for their students, particularly through upskilling teaching and delivery support staff, and providers are now delivering more Level 3+ apprenticeships with employer needs at the forefront of outcomes (with an increase in the number of employed learners at Level 3 as shown in ILR analysis). As a result, providers report that they have become more employer-focussed, with an emphasis on local skills needs across a variety of industry-specific economic requirements.

Despite these positive changes, providers have expressed a number of concerns. Many believe that meeting Government set apprenticeship targets will be a major challenge, particularly in the context of new Trailblazer standards. There is a risk that provision will tend toward 'apprenticeship volume' rather than delivering quality training. Participants also reported that, despite reforms to simplify the FE system, the apprenticeship landscape is difficult to navigate, with bureaucracy still a major problem – particularly for employers involved in setting up Trailblazer standards. For many providers, the change in focus towards apprenticeship delivery has led to a shift in strategic focus. While this means that the quality of apprenticeship teaching improves and colleges and employer providers are more adept and efficient in ensuring learners gain employer-relevant skills, it also leads to a reduction in other learning opportunities, particularly those focused on adult skills.

The broader programme of FE reforms has also impacted on apprenticeship delivery by providers. A number of providers report that they had actually seen a *decrease* in the number of 16-18 year olds available to fill apprenticeship positions and suggested that this was a result of the raising of the school leaving age to 18. Many young people are, therefore, not necessarily moving into apprenticeship training but are opting to stay in schools or general FE. Although GCSE maths and English for those without a grade C or above is not a requirement for an apprenticeship, many providers felt there is an expectation apprentices would take this route. Many participants said GCSEs are counterintuitive in conjunction with apprenticeship implementation and delivery: employers are often not interested in GCSEs; the examination windows for GCSEs are not in line with apprenticeship requirements – a particular challenge for those learning providers that offer a "roll on-roll off" qualification approach; while administering GCSE examinations can be a logistical challenge for providers (and particularly those with less traditional delivery models – such as online for example).

Apprenticeships lie at the heart of the Government's vision for reforming the FE and skills system and encouraging economic growth. As context, **Figure 63** shows that the number of apprenticeship starts⁴¹ increased from 175,000 in 2005/06 to around 520,000 in 2011/12 but then declined somewhat (though the figure for 2014/15 is for an incomplete year and the final total for this latest year has not yet been determined).

Figure 64 Apprenticeship starts in England – 2005/6-2014/15 (provisional).



The focus on apprenticeships being employer-driven was emphasised in the Richard Review (2012), which had noted that employers are *'best placed to judge the quality and relevance of training and demand the highest possible Standards from training organisations'*.⁴² As such, the Coalition Government at the time emphasised the following recommendations for Apprenticeships⁴³:

- A clear definition of what an apprenticeship should be: a job role which is new to the individual, requires them to learn a substantial amount, and prepares them to do this new job effectively;
- Focusing on the outcome of apprenticeship – what the apprentice can do – rather than the process of developing that competency;
- Introducing trusted, independent assessment;
- Recognised industry standards as the basis of every apprenticeship with links to professional registration where this exists in sectors;
- Apprentices achieve Level 2 English and maths before completion of training;
- Ensuring funding creates the right incentives, with the purchasing power for training lying with employers;

41 SFA (2015) Apprenticeship Starts in England. SFA.

42 <http://www.schoolforstartups.co.uk/richard-review/richard-review-full.pdf>

43 BIS (2013) The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan. BIS.

- Greater diversity and innovation in training – with employers and the government safeguarding quality;
- Individual employers, employer partnerships or other organisations with the relevant expertise are included in the design and development of apprenticeship qualifications.

Since then, engaging with employers (particularly through specific reforms such as the development of Trailblazer Standards) has become a central theme of apprenticeship policy in England, and is a response to growing recognition of the importance of engaging employers in the content of apprenticeship training and assessment. By expanding the role of employers, policy makers believed that more robust linkages can be created between apprenticeships and the skills required by the labour market. In this context, this chapter focuses on the impact of these reforms on participating providers in our research.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

There are three key areas where provision has changed or been adapted as a result of changes to apprenticeships. These are:

- Adapting existing delivery models.
- Increased engagement with a wider range of stakeholders.
- A reduction in the breadth of learning offer at providers.

Adapting existing delivery models

Participants in depth interviews consistently reported that there had been a significant increase in apprenticeship provision across the provider network (this contrasts somewhat with the later data in Figure 63). This has led to a focus on responding to employer skills needs in both local and regional contexts with a focus on 16-19 provision, as opposed to simply delivering qualifications across a range of age groups:

‘Our fastest growing area is probably apprenticeships, where we have around 800, 900 apprenticeships and growing ... We’ve seen ... a shrinking of our overall adult provision but the volume of our provision, sixteen-to-nineteen, has actually grown.’
(General FE College)

For many providers, the focus on directly meeting employers’ needs has meant a cultural shift across a range of staff – from teachers to those in senior management – from simply providing qualified learners to delivering skills for the jobs that are available in local areas:

‘Staff now think ‘Will this benefit the learner?’ ‘Will this benefit the employer?’ That’s the ethos now ... That’s the most important thing, because if you get the ethos right, everything else will follow. The most significant things thereafter as a

result of that, have been the significant growth in apprenticeships, the significant growth in sixteen to nineteen learners, which has doubled, and the significant growth in HE in FE.’ (General FE College)

Coupled with this ethos, of a more strongly entrenched employer-driven approach to provision, there has been a move away from academic qualifications and a readjustment toward delivering vocational training for technical and professional skills pathways:

‘By focussing on employer demand employers get the right staff with the right skills. This has a knock on effect in that young people gain valuable employment skills and local economies thrive. The employer is key though.’ (Private Provider)

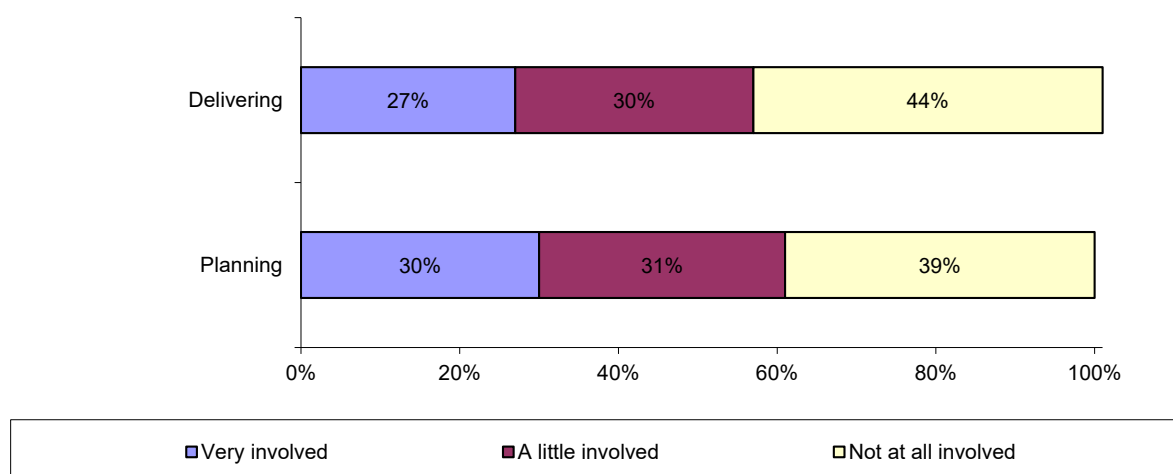
As reflected in our ILR data analysis, providers, particularly private providers, are offering more Level 3+ apprenticeship training delivered according to a model which reproduces employment conditions – with learners expected to wear uniforms, turn up on time and behave as they would in a workplace. Some respondents also emphasise that this means they now offer roll-on roll-off training – where learners gain apprenticeship qualifications as and when they are ready, and not when specific exam periods dictate. This makes delivery more challenging, but also more business relevant:

‘The move towards more employer involvement has been massively welcomed, because it makes it a more commercially recognisable sales model. So that’s had a huge positive impact and has opened up a lot of business opportunities.’ (Private Provider)

In this context, of a move toward Level 3+ apprenticeships and a realistic employer experience, Higher Apprenticeships were also reported as being more significant (see **Figure 64**). Our survey of FE providers, for example, shows that around three-fifths (61%) of providers were involved in planning Higher Apprenticeships, [with three in ten (30%) very involved and the remainder (31%) a little involved]. FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to be very involved in this planning (49%, compared with 28%), with a significantly higher proportion of private providers than FE colleges not involved at all (44%, compared with 15%). This is also the case in the delivery of Higher Apprenticeships. Nearly three-fifths (57%) of FE providers were involved in delivering Higher Apprenticeships. This includes just over a quarter of FE providers (27%) that are very involved in delivery, with a slightly higher proportion (30%) a little involved.

Again, FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to be involved in delivering Higher Apprenticeships (79%, compared with 54%) and particularly to be very involved (38%, compared with 26%). Just two in five ‘other’ providers (39%) have been involved in planning Higher Apprenticeships and just one in three (33%) have been involved in their delivery.

Figure 65: Extent to which providers have been involved in planning and delivering Higher Apprenticeships



Q3F, all respondents, base=329

For some private providers, the reason for lower involvement in Higher Apprenticeship development was because of a traditional and entrenched focus on delivering level 2 and 3 apprenticeships and because of staffing limitations:

'I would like to think that we could move into Higher Apprenticeships but within the private providers that's fairly limited. They tend to be level two, level three deliveries. I think it's the colleges who have the staff with the right level of academic achievement themselves to deliver the higher level programmes ... I'm not saying that's 100% but ... we tend to hit the lower end.' (Private Provider)

FE colleges that were heavily involved in the planning and delivery of Higher Apprenticeships reported that they focussed their delivery on providing high-quality HE opportunities in general, with Higher Apprenticeships as part of this strategy. Planning and delivery was not necessarily seen as different between Higher Apprenticeships and general HE within colleges. Coupled with a strong focus on employer need, Higher Apprenticeships were often promoted within a college's HE provision, as the following quote indicates:

'So we've grown the Higher Level Apprenticeships a bit but we've grown our part-time HE as well, which we regard as pretty much the same thing ... We work closely with the NHS and for some time we've wanted to run degree level apprenticeships for nurses, so I've written to the SFA to try and do that. It's an obvious one to do, the demand is huge.' (General FE College)

The study of maths and English at GCSE for those without a grade C or above is not a requirement for an apprenticeship for 16 to 19 year olds. However, many providers felt there is an expectation apprentices would take this route. For example, guidance materials discussing maths and English study as part of an apprenticeship often discuss

in some detail how to integrate GCSEs into training⁴⁴. This builds an expectation amongst providers that young learners who have not achieved a C or above in maths and English GCSEs should continue to study for GCSEs and this expectation has caused some challenges in delivering apprenticeships. These challenges are particularly acute for providers who deliver apprenticeships that include English and maths provision within standards as many learners have not achieved appropriate levels. Common challenges to provision in these instances included:

- A lack of clarity from stakeholders regarding the content of the GCSE requirement of apprenticeship and what will be required in new apprenticeship standards.
- Poor understanding of apprenticeship requirements amongst individuals and employers. One result is that many learners have left their studies to re-enrol elsewhere to avoid having to take the GCSEs.
- Many apprentices do not see GCSE as relevant to them. These learners are already undertaking a significant qualification as part of the apprenticeship. Many will also have a full-time job and family commitments and do not have the required time to put into the GCSE over a nine-month period. There have been examples of learners leaving their apprenticeships as a result, and in some instances employers have terminated contracts as GCSE is not seen as critical to their jobs.

One conclusion to draw from the evidence is providers misunderstand the requirements in relation to maths and English GCSEs as applied to apprenticeships which may require further communication work to address.

Increased engagement with a wider range of stakeholders

Another outcome of the increased focus on apprenticeship delivery has been increased engagement with a wider cross-section of provider stakeholders and organisations. More detailed and significant employer engagement is taking place to identify both future skills needs and potential funding streams. Local Enterprise Partnerships, for example, are playing an increasingly important role in provider delivery. Networking with other providers in local areas is also important in sharing best practice for existing staff to improve student learning quality.

There has been an increase in engagement with employers in local and regional contexts. This is either through direct employer engagement or through sub-regional groups such as LEPs. Providers say they are increasingly ensuring that there is employer representation on their boards – this can range from the Chambers of Commerce to LEPs to individual local businesses. However, as noted earlier, LEPs appear to discourage representation on their boards from multiple providers. It should be noted that many providers also considered that this increased employer engagement and

⁴⁴ See, for example, AELP guidance to providers on the subject:
www.aelp.org.uk/file/?id=1808&type=item

networking was increasingly taking place anyway – that it was not necessarily or solely driven by a focus on apprenticeship growth and employer demand.

Primary focus on apprenticeships has meant that other learning opportunities have reduced as a result

Providers report that a focus on apprenticeships has led to a corresponding focus on ensuring quality in delivery and on delivering skills which match the jobs that local employers need to fill. This is clearly seen as a positive step, but some of the outcomes of this mean that other types of provision, particularly around adult skills, can be reduced (of particular significance given the cuts to the adult skills budget). Providers reported that they were increasingly focussing on efficient delivery of a narrower curriculum, potentially at the expense of learning opportunities for all or of learning in areas that are more focused on personal rather than economic development.

Perceived impact of the changes

The change to the apprenticeships component of the FE Reform programme has led some providers to adapt their provision accordingly. The changes have had significant impact on providers, employers and learners – some positive and some negative. Impact has also arisen as a result of the interplay between the different elements of the Reform programme.

More employer-focused

Because provision across providers is focused on apprenticeship delivery, providers are more strongly focussed on employer demand and on delivery of skills that are relevant to businesses and the local economy, and which will stay with apprentices through the subsequent duration of their chosen careers. The following quote uses the Highways Trailblazer as an example. The key difference between Trailblazer standards and existing apprenticeship frameworks is the level of ownership of the content by employers to directly meet specific business needs:

‘Look at the Highways Trailblazer ... people do such a fundamentally different programme ... it is going to prepare them so much better, it’s going to be so much broader. It’s going to give them the right skills to be able to, not only just operate on an apprentice level, but actually to serve them through their career. Without them having to go back to training providers and keep dipping in for a bit of this and a bit of that. They’re going to be really competent individuals.’ (Private Provider)

This impact is seen across other business sectors too. The following example concerns business and finance provision. What this quote suggests is that employer needs, while varying in nature, are becoming generally pervasive across a wide range of industries and economies:

'We were in apprenticeships across banking, insurance, finance, marketing, enterprise, management and others. The businesses that we we're working with ... were bemoaning the fact that the graduates they were getting were not oven-ready ... So, we started talking to employers ... 'what do you want?' ... 'What fits your bill?' ... They talked about young people right universities got them, who had a basic degree of skill, but actually had the behaviours and that were ambitious, and that wanted a professional career, and then had a bit of an idea about which way to go.' (Private Provider)

One concern that came from providers (specifically within the context of the new Trailblazer Apprenticeship Standards) is that Government targets are very ambitious, and there a risk that provision will focus on apprenticeship volume rather than quality training. This could be challenging specifically for employers associated with Trailblazer Standards where part of the cost of an apprenticeship is met by the employer. Ensuring potentially conflicting policy requirements – increasing the number of apprenticeships, maintaining and improving quality, asking employers to fund a proportion of the training requirements – are met will be a challenge:

'I think apprenticeships are a great thing. I just think by doing the Trailblazers and all these sorts of things, we're just making it harder and harder and harder and harder for people to get involved with them. If the government has got this target of 3 million, it really needs to think about how it's going to do that because...it's very, very hard to deliver a quality programme and tick everybody's boxes at the same time.' (Private Provider)

In this context, respondents suggested that the apprenticeship system can be a difficult landscape to make sense of. With ambitious targets, with quality a priority, and with more ways to engage with employers and deliver apprenticeships, the system needs to be easier to navigate. Many respondents suggest that bureaucracy is still a problem, despite policies aiming to simplify the system:

'I still feel this whole world is shrouded in bureaucracy. It's shrouded in complexity, and I understand there has to be a level of rules and regulations because obviously it's public monies. I do get that, but for anyone to get involved in this world, it's an acronymic nightmare, if I'm absolutely honest...we are the employer provider and therefore you could say that, actually, we should have seen a quite marked reduction in bureaucracy...I haven't seen that at all.' (Private Provider)

With regard to Traineeships, providers suggested that many young people do not see a huge value in the programme – primarily through a lack of information about why they should engage. Equally, providers are struggling to communicate the value of Traineeships to employers as a result:

'Young people struggle to see why they would do it, come onto a programme where they're going to work, you know, a million miles away from full-time hours

and receive nothing for it. I think employers very much struggle to get their heads around it as well ... and we didn't do particularly well making it clear to the employers the need for it.' (Private Provider)

This is not to say that the Traineeship programme is unpopular in itself, but rather that there is a difficult task in bridging the gap between the purpose and objectives of the programme and the impact it will have on young people and employers:

'One of the things that we are going to do more of, actually, is traineeships but it's overcoming the fact that the young people that we have who are suitable for traineeships are going to struggle to get work experience or to be able to survive work experience. So, we need to think about how we support them to do that.' (General FE College)

Narrowing of other learning opportunities for wider groups of individuals

As noted earlier, increasing focus on apprenticeship delivery means that one effect is that the quality of apprenticeship improves and colleges and employer providers are more adept and efficient in ensuring learners gain employer-relevant skills. However, while the focus on delivering apprenticeships has seen provision within the 16-19 year old market thrive (as also highlighted in earlier ILR analysis) it has had the impact of reducing opportunities elsewhere in the system. This is particularly the case when learners are interested in courses or qualification that are not directly related to employment opportunities and adult learners want to enrol within a college – as colleges have experienced significant funding cuts to 19+ learners:

'Our biggest volume of work is with young people and we also have a very large apprenticeship programme and clearly over the last few years, a declining number of adults ... Our starting point for the adult budget from the SFA wasn't particularly high ... The remaining adult budget, which was spent on adults attending courses, is now tiny for us. As the last couple of years have gone past, more and more courses have been restricted. We've had to just say, 'You can't study on this course if you're an adult unless you can pay the full fee. Ultimately, and I don't think the government's going to change its course, that's where everybody will end up.' (General FE College)

Many providers warned, therefore, that, although apprenticeship may be the right qualification for many, particularly younger learners, it is not right for everyone. The quote below exemplifies this:

'There is a danger that we see that as a silver bullet which is the panacea to everything, and then whole chunks of people who require learning and training won't have a type of learning and training-, there won't be a type of learning and training available which is the one that's suitable for them.' (Specialist FE College)

Where other policy changes have impacted on the quality of provision for apprenticeships

Apprenticeship reforms do not sit in isolation from other FE Reform programme changes. In many instances the impact of these other reforms has the potential to diminish positive apprenticeship outcomes. This is often a real problem for private or employer providers or for providers whose delivery models are less traditional. A number of examples were discussed in interviews with providers.

Firstly, a number of respondents reported that they had actually seen a *decrease* in the number of 16-18 year olds available to fill apprenticeship positions. Respondents suggested that this was a result of the raising of the school leaving age to 18. Many young people are therefore not necessarily moving into apprenticeship training. The ILR analysis supports this view as school provision has seen an increase in learner numbers compared to other provider types. Poor information, advice, and guidance was considered as one reason for this lack of movement, while respondents also suggested that parents did not know that students could explore different learning opportunities outside of a general FE setting:

'I think one of the big changes that we're experiencing is, and I don't believe we're alone in this, we get now a number of good quality apprenticeship vacancies that are going unfilled ... There seems to be a shift away from ... sixteen-year-olds leaving school and coming to us for an apprenticeship. There still seems to be an increased number at the older end of the age group. They perhaps do a year or so at college and then come back at seventeen-eighteen... So that changes the profile of the learners that we're dealing with ... It's getting harder to maintain that 16 to 18 provision, because the numbers and the right quality coming through all seem to be diminishing and dying off.' (General FE College)

Secondly, the perception that learners who have not achieved a GCSE grade C in English and maths need to do so provides difficulties when delivering apprenticeships. In many instances, respondents perceive this as a conflicting requirement in apprenticeships as employers are often not interested in that qualification, while the examination window for GCSEs are not in line with apprenticeship requirements – particularly the roll on/off approach which employers do not like either.

Case study participants, for example, suggested that employers are more concerned with the skills an individual has rather than their qualifications. Many of the employers they engage with want people with functional skills, or at least people who are able to fulfil their tasks as an employee – the investment in time for the GCSEs is therefore of limited interest and they do not necessarily want to release apprentices to study for English and maths GCSEs:

'The skills employers want, Functional Skills, are about interpreting a situation in context – it's more vocational, that's what employers want. A lot about GCSE is

about preparing you for your A-levels. These learners aren't doing the GCSE to progress onto A-levels, they're doing it because they have to do it. Employers want practical application in a vocational setting; not theoretical learning which primarily prepares you for higher education.' (Private Provider)

Concerns about the ability for employers to engage effectively with apprenticeship demands

Finally, there are concerns amongst respondents that some employers, particularly Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) may struggle to access apprenticeship opportunities in the first instance and then to fulfil support or financial requirements. While ILR data analysis shows that learners in SMEs accounted for two-thirds of all learners in 2013/14, the quote below suggests that, for many SMEs, recruiting an apprentice will be beyond their financial scope:

'I think there are some real issues there around funding as we go forward and whether that actually could end up being quite a turn off for many employers. I think for the bigger employers that want to take control of the funding that's absolutely right and there's already a route there for them to do that, but certainly small, medium employers don't see that as something that they want.' (Private Provider)

Respondents also report that there is the possibility that sectors will lose capacity through the Trailblazers programme:

'We work with big companies, but the majority of our work is with small and medium businesses. We would like to think that, because of our place in the architecture that is about helping to move those businesses forward in terms of business growth and individual growth for the employees within it. So, we get to hear a lot of what they want and what they need doesn't really feature in a lot of the trailblazers ... There's a policy directive that's driving You run the risk of it being fit for neither fish nor fowl, in that sense. There'll be the very small amount of large businesses that have their own direct contract that win. The other businesses and the individuals will lose, and you will lose capacity in the marketplace ... So if the reforms are pushed through as they are currently proposed, I think you will lose 20% of capacity in the first year as a minimum. I think by year three you could've lost as much as 50% of the capacity if you're not careful.' (Private Provider)

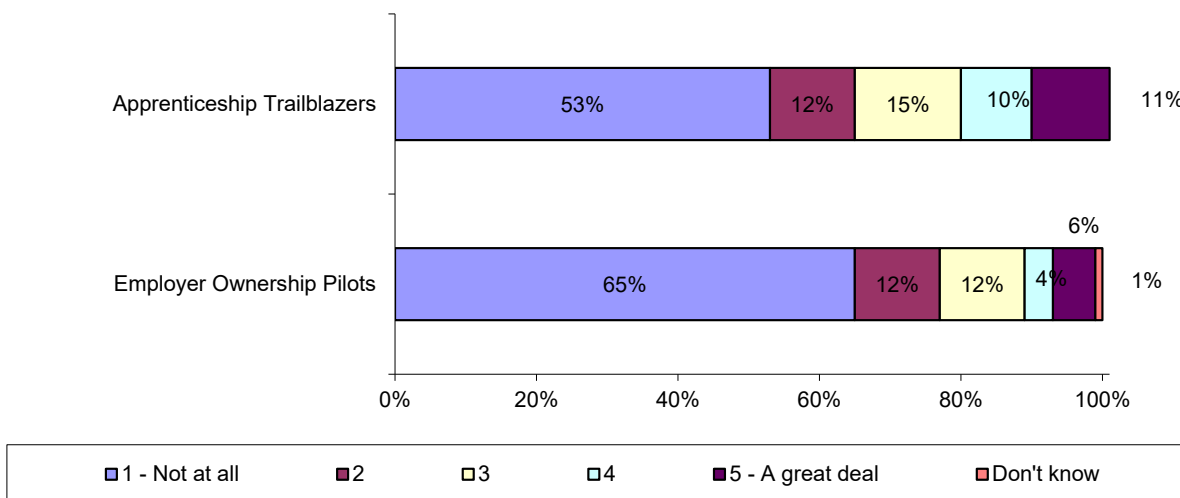
Further concerns with the Trailblazer standards are described by respondents. In particular, providers have stated that they have felt distanced from the consultation

process or are unhappy generally with the level of bureaucracy involved.⁴⁵ This indicates potential and pervasive dissatisfaction with apprenticeship administration processes in general which could impact on successful delivery:

‘The main impact for us for the FE reform was to decide to not continue with professional qualifications based around the apprenticeship framework which is the only employer-responsive funding route available at the moment. So, you know, the reforms were set out to improve it for employers, more directed towards employers. However, we were not listened to, we were not consulted effectively and as a result this business and certainly I understand, this sector, is basically very quickly removing itself from the arena.’ (Private Provider)

Results from the FE provider survey (**Figure 65**) also show that only a minority of FE providers reported having been engaged with Apprenticeship Trailblazers (21% gave a rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale, where 1 is not at all, and 5 is a great deal). Also, only a minority, 10%, reported they engaged with Employer Ownership Pilots:

Figure 66: Extent to which providers have engaged with specific activities



Q17, all respondents, base=329

Summary

As this chapter has outlined, providers of all types are addressing apprenticeship reform by increasing their vocational offer, by ensuring that provision meets demand through

⁴⁵ CFE Research are also undertaking an evaluation of the Apprenticeship Trailblazer Standards for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which is due for publication in the Autumn/Winter 2015

stronger employer and stakeholder consultation, and by adapting their delivery models accordingly. The extent to which this is a direct result of the FE Reform programme, however, is unclear. Further, respondents have highlighted that there is a more complex interplay of policies across the reform programme in general. This interplay can, as a result, lead to unintended impact. Finally, there are concerns that a focus on apprenticeships at the expense of a wider range of learning opportunities has the potential to marginalise some groups, particularly within the adult skills arena, and that not all employers (SMEs particularly) are able to accommodate the financial and budgetary responsibilities that recruiting an apprentice brings.

13. Use of technology

Key findings

The majority of providers reported that they had increased the use of technology in recent years to help deliver teaching and learning or support learners more widely. Most changes related to using technology to deliver teaching in an innovative, creative and transformative manner, or to increase the number of ways in which their learners could access resources.

Key staffing and resource-related challenges that providers faced when implementing technological changes included balancing these requirements with available staff time and recruiting appropriately skilled staff.

The extent to which providers had made changes varied, with some having made extensive changes whilst others had simply built on their existing practices. Most providers noted that the changes were mostly to improve the experience of learning and teaching for their learners, followed by increasing the cost effectiveness of delivery.

Perceived impact

Providers were very positive about the impact changes have had on their organisation and its learners. In particular, they believed that whilst learning materials were now more readily available outside of the classroom, this had not had a substantial impact on the number of guided learner hours. The availability of technological learning made learners more likely to engage as they are used to using technology in their everyday lives.

How provision has changed as a result of this policy

In survey, all FE providers were asked about changes to the ways they have used technology over recent years (see **Figure 66**).

Overall, 91% of all FE providers reported increasing the use of technology to deliver teaching and learning or in terms of its availability to learners. This proportion increased to 99% of FE Colleges.

Nearly three-fifths of FE providers (58%) had used technology to deliver teaching in an innovative, creative, or transformative model, increasing to 72% of FE colleges. Slightly

fewer FE providers (56%) had increased the ways in which learners can access resources from multiple platforms, devices and locations (again increasing amongst FE colleges to 65%). Thus, technology has been a significant means of diversification in teaching delivery.

Around three in ten FE providers had increased the use of public platforms or freely available resources in delivering learning (31%) or increased the use of provider owned or licensed enabled platforms in delivering learning (29%). While FE colleges were slightly more likely to have done the former than private providers (35%, compared with 27%); they were significantly more likely to have done the latter (40%, compared with 25%).

A quarter of FE providers (25%) [FE colleges (24%) and private providers (25%)] had increased the availability of provider-owned hardware for learners; while one in six FE providers (18%) had increased provision to enable learners to use their own devices. FE colleges were more than twice as likely as private providers to have enabled learners to use their own devices (28%, compared with 12%).

Figure 67: How providers utilised technology to a greater or different extent over recent years

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	329	65	205	59
Used technology to deliver teaching in an innovative, creative or transformative model	58%	72%	51%	58%
Increased the ways in which learners can access resources from multiple platforms, devices and locations	56%	65%	53%	54%
Increased the use of public platforms or freely available resources in delivering learning	31%	35%	27%	35%
Increased the use of provider owned or licensed enabled platforms in delivering learning	29%	40%	25%	26%
Increased the availability of provider owned hardware for learners	25%	24%	25%	24%
Increased provision to enable learners to use their own devices	18%	28%	12%	21%
Increased provision to enable learners to source their own devices	11%	15%	10%	9%
Our organisation has not utilised technology to a greater or different extent over recent years	8%	1%	10%	10%
Don't know	1%	0%	1%	0%

Q10A, all respondents, bases shown in table

FE providers that had used technology to a greater extent or in a different way over recent years were asked about the challenges that they may have faced in ensuring their staff were competent to respond to these changes (see **Figure 67**).

The overall pattern in the results was that FE colleges were more likely than private providers to identify most of the possible challenges which were presented to them in a list. Workload, training of existing staff, and costs of staff recruitment were each more frequently seen as a challenge by colleges than by private providers. Encouragingly, resistance from staff to the introduction of new technology was very infrequent for all types of provider:

Figure 68: The perceived challenges in terms of ensuring the competency of staff to respond to changes in the use of technology

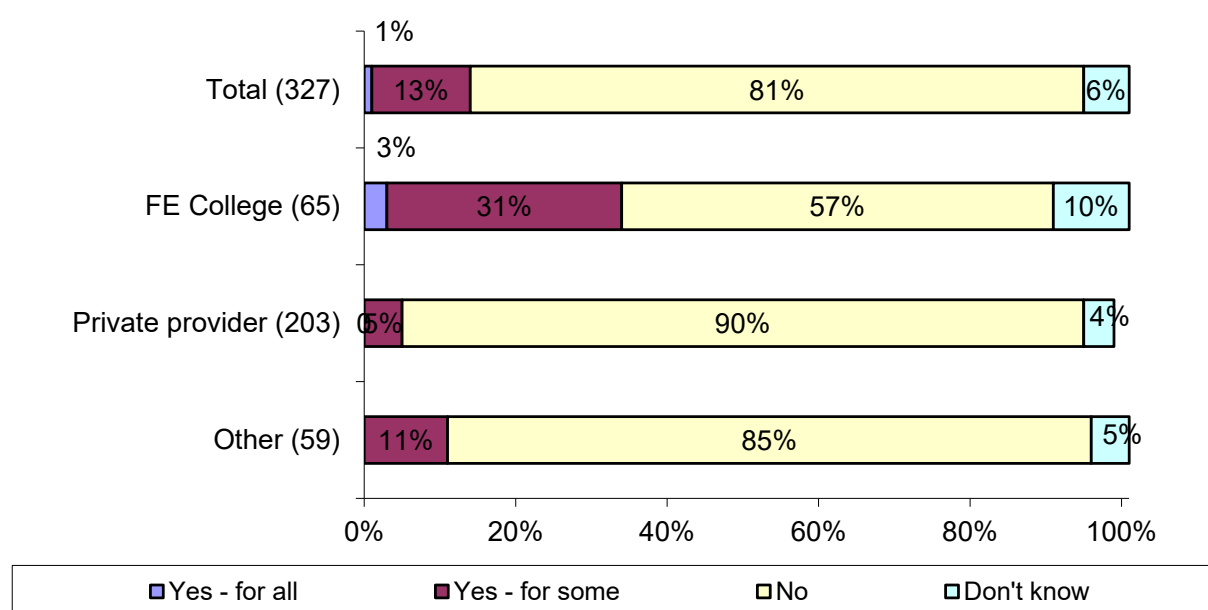
	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	326	65	202	59
Balancing requirements with staff time/workload	71%	80%	64%	81%
The costs associated with training and developing staff	64%	63%	61%	76%
Recruiting appropriately skilled staff	59%	58%	59%	57%
Training existing staff	55%	59%	51%	64%
Ensuring quality	50%	50%	47%	57%
The costs associated with recruiting staff	50%	59%	50%	34%
Resistance from staff, inc older staff, against new technology	3%	6%	1%	2%
Other	7%	6%	7%	9%
None of the above	13%	6%	17%	7%

Q10C, where have utilised technology over recent years (valid responses only), bases shown in table

Only one in seven FE providers (14%) that made changes with the help of technology had accessed the Innovation Code to draw down non-standard learning funding for digital activity (see **Figure 68**). This represents 1% of providers overall.

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private and 'other' providers to have used the Innovation Code (34%, compared with 5% and 11% respectively). This represents 3% of all FE colleges.

Figure 69: Whether providers have accessed the Innovation Code to draw down non-standard learning funding for digital activity



Q11A, where have utilised technology over recent years (valid responses only) , bases shown in brackets

The survey also identified that, on average, just 7% of non-standard learning funding has been drawn down for digital activity. The average proportion of funding drawn down was slightly higher amongst private providers than amongst FE colleges (9%, compared with 6%).

In depth interviews, there was a great deal of variation in the reported extent to which colleges and providers' use of ICT and provision had changed and in the extent to which changes had been as a result of the reform programme. A few of those interviewed made it clear that they had made a number of changes to strategy and/or practice and methods as a direct result of this policy. However, others said that some of the changes made would have come about anyway as a natural progression from their previous activity. A small number reported few changes in provision with regard to ICT.

The most variation in responses was seen amongst general FE colleges. Several had introduced substantial change and innovation, some of which had been driven specifically by the reforms. Other colleges reported some changes, but these were less extensive. Others reported few changes and/or said that these changes were not as a result of the further education reforms.

Most private training providers had made some changes to their ICT and provision in recent years. Many had also changed their management systems and processes, moving from paper-based to electronic systems.

'Other' providers were roughly divided into two groups; those which had made changes in response to the reforms, and those which had not, or which had not been able to as yet.

General Further Education Colleges

In more detail, responses from general FE colleges with regard to changes in the use of ICT as a result of the FE reform programme varied. Some had made substantial changes in the last five years. Several colleges mentioned that their ICT strategies had changed. For example, one reported that, in contrast to their previous ICT strategy to replace PCs every year, they now did not do this as a matter of course. Instead, they were looking at ways to make more use of learners' own devices such as tablets and mobile phones. One college said that in the past their approach to ICT had been piecemeal but now it was becoming embedded, with more interactive learning and free Wi-Fi. They had implemented a Moodle platform for staff and were encouraging them to be proficient and creative in its use. Another highlighted the increasing prominence of ICT in their strategic planning:

'I would say the electronic agenda dominates our planning now, whereas, it was a periphery issue before.' (General FE College)

Some colleges had set up specific forums or departments to oversee ICT strategy and implementation, and some had created new roles charged with assisting teaching and learning staff to use ICT more effectively. For example, one college had set up a small department five years ago to develop ICT use across the college. In the last two years, this had grown to include 12 staff assisting teachers to use their learning materials in different ways through technology. This in turn was changing the way that staff and learners use ICT. Likewise, another college had created an advanced practitioner post that was purely focused on assisting staff to better use technology in their teaching methods and materials. A few colleges reported using ICT in assessments or to monitor learner progress. One college had set up a specific project team a year ago in response to the FELTAG report⁴⁶ on the benefits of using ICT in classrooms and of social media in developing learners' digital skills. They held events with keynote speakers and encouraged staff and learners to attend and share their experiences. A small number of other colleges also reported that FELTAG had driven some of their activities.

Some colleges had upgraded their hardware and a few mentioned having installed free Wi-Fi access. However, others said that cost was a concern for them, both in terms of purchasing hardware and software, and also regarding the time needed for staff to fully

⁴⁶ FELTAG (2014) Paths forward to a digital future for Further Education and Skills. Further Education Learning Technology Action Group. <http://feltag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/FELTAG-REPORT-FINAL.pdf>

engage with ICT. A few colleges reported that they expected staff to use CPD to help them make best use of the technology available to them:

'We're doing the best we can with limited resources.' (General FE College)

It was clear that some of the changes and innovations described above had been as a direct result of the Reform programme. But some colleges highlighted that while progress had been made, this was not all driven by FE reforms rather it was an extension of what they were already doing:

'Changes were being made prior to the reforms, and continue without real notice of the reform recommendations or FELTAG requirements.' (General FE College)

A few colleges said that there had not been any substantial changes in ICT use and provision and that any changes made were a natural progression from their previous activity. For example, one college reported that they had for some time provided online learning alongside classroom time and that they would continue to do this, but they had made few changes due to the reforms or since the reforms had been introduced.

A large FE college spoke of the challenges of making ICT progress – they had been slow to respond due to the scale of change that was required and the financial investments needed. They felt that the FELTAG report underestimated the time and expense involved in bringing about the changes called for.

Private training providers

There was considerable activity and change reported by the private training providers. Some had invested heavily in ICT in recent years. This included new infrastructure as well as new software and management information systems to streamline their processes. Several private providers noted that they had converted from paper-based systems to electronic systems which were more efficient.

A number of providers had increased the use of ICT in their teaching and learning – for example, through e-learning options, or the introduction of e-portfolios. One provider was exploring how they could use distance learning and podcasts. A few providers reported having implemented specific software into their provision. For example, one now used video software in its sign language courses, and another had introduced WebE software to conduct groups and provide videos for teaching and learning.

Private providers were less 'strategic' than FE colleges in their responses on this issue. However, one private provider reported that the reforms had pushed them into using ICT as a wider teaching and learning resource. Another private provider had introduced an IT forum charged with both a strategic and operational function for the provider as a whole:

'I looked at the forums to almost challenge me, or I will feedback to them and say, 'Look, you know, this policy's coming in. What does this mean for us as an organisation? Come back to me with how we implement it.'
(Private Provider)

Some of these changes may have been in direct response to the reforms, but many were not. Change was also driven by the need to be competitive and to deliver what learners and employers needed and expected, as well as by the interests and placement of that organisation in the market:

'We've always been investing in technology, it's our thing, we love the technology.' (Private Provider)

One provider highlighted the importance of the sector keeping pace with technological advances as new cohorts of learners will increasingly require this:

'Now we have the millennium babies coming up next year into the workplace, they've only ever known digital... That's where teaching and learning has to go next, and that's where the sector has to go next really.'
(Private Provider)

Other private providers noted that ICT was becoming increasingly vital in the sector, both as a vehicle for teaching and learning, and also as a skill requirement for many of the jobs available for their learners. Another noted that they had been investing in ICT for the last 12 years in order to deliver high quality training.

'Other' providers

Some of the 'other' providers had made changes to their ICT use in recent years, and much of this appeared to have been driven at least in part by the reforms. One now used ICT to do assessment and diagnostic work and also to monitor performance and quality. They also carried out online portfolio assessments, and many of their teaching and learning materials were available online, although face-to-face tutorials still took place:

'We have communications now between tutors and learners online... In our English conversation classes we have mini-cameras to actually take evidence of work, portfolio work, so that the work is logged on the computers, and not necessarily learners having to write it.' ('Other' Provider)

Another provided free courses called 'computer and online basics', to help people (especially those aged 55+) to access services which are increasingly provided online only. They also provide courses leading to IT qualifications suitable for the workplace.

Some of these ‘other’ providers had seen little change since or as a result of the FE reforms. One said that their practical learning environment did not lend itself to ICT, although learners were able to access materials electronically, and to communicate with tutors via email. Another provider had found their learners reluctant to engage with technology this far. They were exploring ways of making their ICT resources more user-friendly. One provider reported that the support available from Jisc had not been right for them – they had required something more basic to assist them. As a result they felt that they had struggled to improve and bring about change with regard to ICT.

Why changes were made

In survey, FE providers that increased the extent to which, or changed the way in which, they use technology, were asked, unprompted, why chose to do so (**see Figure 69**). They most frequently mentioned the fact that they wanted to generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for learners (51%). Slightly fewer gave improvement in the cost effectiveness of delivering learning as a reason (49%). Around one in three FE providers reporting change mentioned that it was to enable learners to access learning at a time and/or place convenient for them (34%), to enable better communication between the provider and the learner (31%), and/or to generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for staff (30%).

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to give ‘enabling better communication’ (45%, compared with 27%), ‘generally improving learner learning and teaching experiences’ (56%, compared with 46%) and ‘staff learning and teaching experiences’ (36%, compared with 24%) as reasons.

One in five FE colleges and private providers (22% and 21% respectively) has built on their use of technology to widen learning beyond the classroom. Less commonly cited reasons included: to keep up to date with technology/modernisation for the younger generation (11%, increasing to 20% amongst FE colleges); to meet the targets recommended by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) (6%, increasing to 10% of FE colleges); to make the learning more accessible to learners with specific educational needs and disabilities (5%); and because of the need for overall improvements to the business or demand for the changes (4%).

Figure 70: Reasons for providers choosing to use technology in this way

	Total	FE College	Private provider	Other
Sample bases	327	65	203	59
To generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for learners	51%	56%	46%	61%
To improve the cost effectiveness of delivering learning	49%	55%	51%	36%
To enable learners to access learning at a time and/or place convenient for them	34%	30%	34%	39%
To enable better communication between the provider and the learner	31%	45%	27%	27%
To generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for staff	30%	36%	24%	40%
To widen learning beyond the classroom	20%	22%	21%	16%
Keep up to date with technology/modernisation for the younger generation	11%	20%	9%	4%
To meet the targets recommended by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG)	6%	10%	5%	5%
To make the learning more accessible to learners with specific educational needs and disabilities	5%	3%	6%	2%
Overall improvements for business/demand for it	4%	3%	3%	10%

Q10B, where have utilised technology over recent years (valid responses only), bases shown in table

In depth interviews, providers cited a range of reasons for having made the reported changes to ICT. Improving teaching and learning quality was a high priority for many of the general FE colleges, alongside making the best use of the resources available to them.

Providing high quality teaching and learning was a driver for private providers too, as they wished to respond to the needs of their learners and of employers in order to remain

competitive. Some had also sought to cut their costs and had invested in online learning in order to do this.

A range of different reasons for changes made were cited by 'other' providers, depending on their individual position and focus.

General Further Education colleges

In more detail, for many of the general FE colleges, the changes they had made with regard to technology were a natural progression or an extension of what they were already doing. A commonly mentioned key driver was to improve teaching and learning, and also to be able to monitor and track learners' progress more effectively:

'Everybody has their virtual learning environments, but we've particularly developed the use of electronic tools for initial assessment, for tracking the students' progress, and also for teaching and learning. You know, the use of the Internet as a resource in the classroom has utterly transformed in the last five years.' (General FE College)

Several colleges had introduced or expanded particular projects, groups or forums concerned with ICT, had introduced new roles or ICT champions, and/or had prioritised CPD as a way of assisting staff to better use ICT in their interactions with learners. Again, one of the motivations for this was to improve teaching and learning quality. However, CPD, and the use of technology champions was also a way of ensuring that they made best use of limited resources:

'We wouldn't have had a very explicit role for somebody in terms of education technology. We now have. We have a network, so every faculty in the college has got an ILT champion.' (General FE College)

Some colleges had taken the decision to prioritise assisting learners to use their own devices to access college materials so that colleges themselves did not have to provide these. This freed up college resources that would otherwise have needed to be spent on hardware.

Private training providers

Some of the private providers, like the general FE colleges, also highlighted that they had been keen to improve their teaching and learning through blended learning solutions and technological innovations such as videos and specific software to support specialist programmes. Several providers also mentioned cutting costs as a driver for investing in developing their online learning offers.

Staying abreast of technological advances in order to provide what learners expected and employers demanded was also very important for private providers. They wished to

maintain a competitive edge and deliver up-to-date and technologically relevant programmes that gave learners the skills they needed.

A number of private providers reported having invested in new management information systems and infrastructure in order to move from paper-based to electronic systems. They had done this to streamline their businesses, and produce better information, to help them to be more *'financially savvy'* as a result.

'Other' providers

'Other' providers gave several different reasons for having made changes. One had wanted to do more efficient assessment and diagnostic work and to better monitor performance and quality. Another had wished to facilitate easier and more efficient communication between learners and tutors. A third had made their ICT changes in order to provide what they believed learners and employers needed in order to access services and to find work:

'The strong driver for our business planning, as well, comes very much from the Local Authority's priorities. They are very closely aligned to upskilling residents to achieve their economic potential, ensuring that nobody's left behind, so digital inclusion and, also, improving people's health and mental wellbeing. Which really fit nicely with some of the messages that are coming out in recent SFA communications.' ('Other' Provider)

Impact of the changes

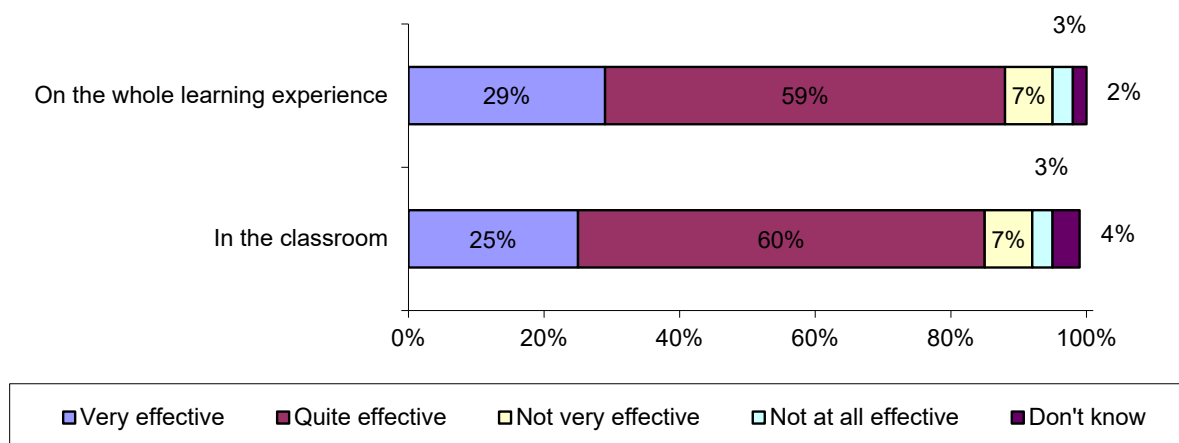
In survey, all providers were asked how effective they felt the use of technology has been *in the classroom* (see **Figure 70**). They were positive on the whole, with 85% of all providers rating the use of technology as very or quite effective, including 25% that rated it as very effective.

Only 10% of FE providers did *not* feel that the use of technology in the classroom has been effective (the remaining 5% were unsure).

They were then asked how effective they feel the use of technology has been *on the whole learning experience*. Again, most were positive and 88% gave a rating of very or quite effective, including 29% that rated it as very effective.

Again, only 10% of FE providers rated the use of technology on the whole learning experience as ineffective (the remaining 2% did not feel able to say).

Figure 71: The perceived effectiveness of the use of technology



Q14, all respondents, base=329

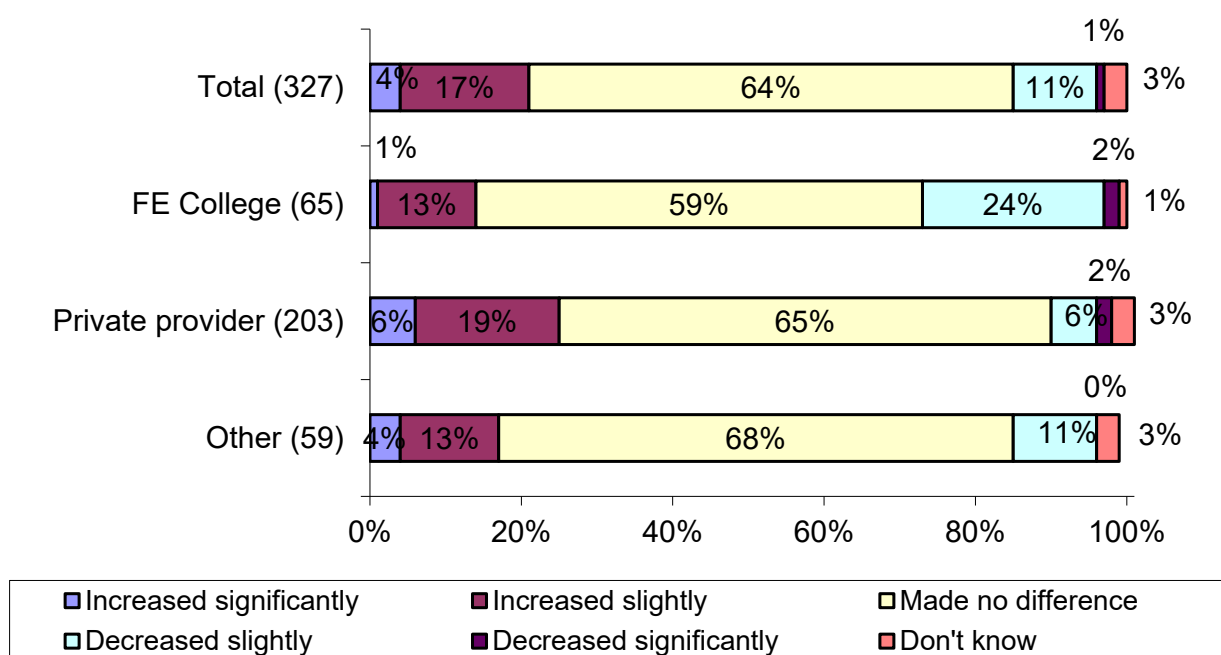
FE colleges were significantly more likely to rate the use of technology in either area as effective – in the classroom, 92%; and on the whole learning experience, 94%, compared with 81% and 85% respectively of private providers.

For the majority of FE providers (64%) which had increased or changed their use of technology in recent years, it has made *no difference* to the number of guided learner hours at their organisation (see **Figure 71**). This proportion is slightly higher amongst private providers than FE colleges (65%, compared with 59%).

Around one in five FE providers (21%) reported *increased* guided hours, which includes 4% that had increased the number of guided hours significantly. A lower proportion (12%) reported a decrease in the number of guided hours, with just 1% reporting a significant decrease.

FE colleges were significantly more likely than private providers to report a *decrease* in the number of guided learner hours as a result of the use of technology – 26% report a slight or significant decrease, compared with 8% of private providers:

Figure 72: The perceived impact the use of technology had on the number of guided learner hours at providers' organisations



Q13, where have utilised technology over recent years, bases shown in brackets

Many of the general further education colleges interviewed in depth reported that they were making more use, and an increasingly wide-ranging use, of ICT in their teaching and learning. However, this appeared to be in addition to, rather than instead of, the more traditional classroom-based and face-to-face methods offered.

In contrast, some private providers had invested in e-learning as a way of reducing their costs in response to budget cuts – ICT-based teaching and learning methods were being substituted for some of the more traditional teaching methods. Other private providers reported that the main impact of ICT had been in the way they managed information as an organisation. Some reported that there had been little change in their use of ICT and no impact as a result.

'Other' providers were divided into those using more technology and those which were not, due to learner resistance or lack of the right kind of support to implement change. Neither group reported changes to the number of guided learner hours.

There had been little use of the Innovation Code, although a few of the general FE colleges had used it in conjunction with ESF funds, and it had also been used by one private provider. It was generally seen to have been too complex and time consuming to pursue, and also too inflexible for some to be eligible.

General Further Education colleges

In more detail, general further education colleges noted a number of different impacts as a result of their increased use of technology. Purchase of up-to-date hardware and software, as well as the availability of free WiFi at some colleges, had resulted in more learning materials being available outside the classroom. Several colleges had devised methods to allow learners to access these using their own devices such as mobile phones and tablets. This in turn had meant that, after the initial outlay of setting up the relevant platforms and systems, spending on hardware was reduced for some:

'We actually need to spend less money, to a certain extent now, because every child, no matter how deprived they are, has a smart phone in their pocket. So, being able to provide parents and children with access to live information and opportunities to interact in a broader way is not something that we necessarily need to take personal responsibility for. So actually we're more designing our processes to be able to take advantage of the kit that they've already got, rather than giving everybody something.' (General FE College)

However, not all colleges had yet found ways to allow learners to use their own devices to access learning materials and provision. For some this remained the next big challenge to tackle:

'The next technological jump is for people to use their own equipment, and we haven't fully broken that yet.' (General FE College)

One college said they were able to develop their use of ICT at a much faster pace as a result of their investments. Another reported that the greater availability and use of ICT had led to substantial improvements in the quality of teaching and learning:

'We use technology far more in terms of improving teaching, the quality of teaching... Videoing the teaching and playing it back and talking over with a staff coach about what was good, what was bad and what went well and what they would do differently... For some it is a bit terrifying, but some people really like it, that's why a range of different techniques is what you need, because different people like and respond to different things.' (General FE College)

There was no evidence from interviews with colleges of any substantial changes to the number of guided learner hours on offer as a result of ICT use. It was seen mainly as an additional resource rather than as a substitute for contact time. There was general agreement that technology should be integrated into teaching and learning, but also that a mixed offer of face-to-face and online learning was best for most learners:

'We had a tradition of online and on-screen learning... and that's been productive. We haven't tended to take students out of the classroom and replace that time with on-screen work, except for them to do assignments and their own independent research tasks.' (General FE College)

'I don't think for any learners at the college, but particularly not either young learners or what I might call adult basic skills learners, I don't think this will all replace any human contact. I just think it has an important part to play in a learning programme.' (General FE College)

One of the colleges had used the Innovation Code to develop an online course for equality and diversity and another had used it in a minor way in conjunction with ESF funds. Two other colleges had looked at using the Innovation Code but after having had discussions with a number of employers, one decided to bid for ESF funds instead, and another, which had also considered using the Innovation Code alongside ESF, said that they were no longer looking at it since the Adult Skills Budget had been cut:

'The Innovation Code is part of the Adult Skills Budget, so we're not looking at the Innovation Code anymore because, well, what's the point? The Adult Skills Budget's been cut.' (General FE College)

Private training providers

Two distinct impacts were reported in the interviews with private training providers. Some had invested in e-learning, online provision and accessible coursework, which had streamlined their delivery. Provision of a greater proportion of online learning had also resulted in cost savings. One provider reported that budget cuts had been the main driver for their e-learning investment. This in turn had changed the skillset of staff they needed to deliver their courses and programmes:

'We've had to say goodbye to some staff... If you're going to learn now, you know, you don't learn with handouts and workbooks, and goodness knows what. You're using many different things... We've changed our approach very much in terms of how we recruit staff, how we support staff.' (Private Provider)

Another provider also noted cost savings, but said that their learners really liked the increased use of ICT. Other providers noted that it was important to reflect the way that many people now used technology in their everyday lives, in the teaching and learning offer:

'There's lots more elements of laptops, iPads, bigger mobile phones connecting to the internet, there's lots more structure in things that we do, as regards some of the Maths elements where they do various things

online. We're making sure that everything that the young person does within the centre is current to their way of living, working, socialising.'
(Private Provider)

One provider highlighted how their e-portfolio approach, and the way that staff development was tied into this, had impacted on teaching methods and had brought about changes for learners. While some private providers appeared to be increasing the proportion of their online learning, one highlighted that they still felt that active teaching methods were vital:

'We're not seeing technology as taking over the teaching. It won't remove instructors from the classroom, that type of thing, but it will complement what they do.' (Private Provider)

A second group of providers reported that the main change in their use of ICT had been in their information management processes. New software and management information systems had led to a greater harmonisation of information and had allowed them to provide more concise and accurate data.

One private provider had used the Innovation Code to pull together units from different qualifications to meet learner needs, although not with respect to ICT. Another was working with some awarding bodies to see if they could take advantage of any opportunities the Innovation Code presented.

None of the other private providers had used the Innovation Code, although a number had considered it. Several reported that it appeared to be too complex and time-consuming to have been a worthwhile investment of their time and energy. One believed that the Innovation Code was poorly understood by the funding partners required to make an application:

'Complexity – understanding and working with the Innovation Code's just not worth the effort.' (Private Provider)

'Most people haven't read it because they don't read the funding rules. So there's this fear of spending or investing in it and then the SFA saying, 'Actually we don't really like what you've done, you can't have the money'.'
(Private Provider)

One private provider said that the Innovation Code did not support their sector and another had found it too inflexible to be of use to them, as an apprenticeship provider:

'How can I use the Innovation Code which identifies you can use it, but the flexibilities in the funding have been withdrawn in latter years? That is an issue on the FE reform.' (Private Provider)

‘Other’ providers

Two ‘other’ providers said that they were now using more technology, and that most of their business was conducted online, although this was not necessarily related to the reform programme. Others reported very limited change, in part as they were not able to access the right level of support for this, and so they reported little impact as a result. Neither group reported any changes to the number of guided learner hours.

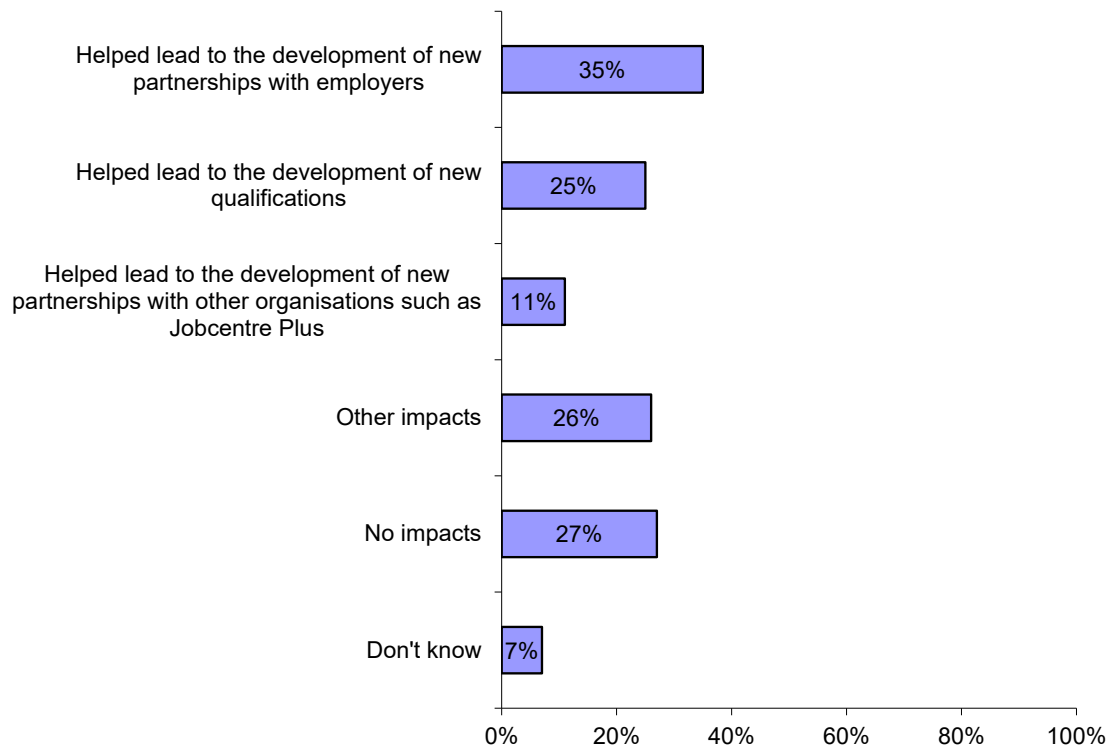
Only one ‘other’ provider had used the Innovation Code, and they had not done so for some time. They highlighted competing demands that had prevented them from pursuing it further:

‘When it was first around we did use the Innovation Code but we probably haven’t used it recently. Again, it’s just time and effort and research and development and all of that, and we just haven’t had time to do. We’ve tended to consolidate back into our main jobs.’ (‘Other’ Provider)

In survey, providers that accessed the Innovation Code to draw non-standard learning funding for all or some digital activity were asked about the impact had had on their organisation and its learners. Two-thirds of these FE providers (66%) reported some impacts.

A third (35%) reported that it helped lead to the development of new partnerships with employers (see **Figure 72**). A quarter of FE providers (25%) that have accessed the Innovation Code reported that it helped lead to the development of new qualifications. Fewer (11%) reported that it helped lead to the development of new partnerships with other organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, while a quarter (26%) mentioned other diverse impacts.

Figure 73: The perceived impact of the Innovation Code on providers and learners



Q12, where accessed the Innovation Code to draw down non-standard learning funding for digital activity, base= 41

14. Changes to careers guidance services

Key findings

Most of the general FE colleges and the private providers had had little or no contact with the National Careers Service and some did not know much about it. The general picture that emerged from colleges and providers was that the National Careers Service was not having any impact. This combined with a view that schools were not meeting their duty to provide impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) meant that providers thought IAG provision had worsened since the demise of Connexions.

Perceived impact

A number of colleges and providers highlighted that there was now a lack of impartial careers advice for young people. They felt that this was leading to many being advised by their schools to stay on into sixth form and pursue academic routes rather than being given the full range of career options available to them. Colleges and providers believed that this was closing down vocational and technical routes, including apprenticeships, for many. They thought that this was impacting negatively on young people and on colleges and providers, which now struggled to recruit to some of their courses.

General FE colleges

Most colleges had had no contact with the National Careers Service. However, the relatively small number of colleges which commented on National Careers Service in depth interviews felt that it was not working. They believed that there had been a reduction in the availability of impartial IAG which had led to increased competition between schools and colleges for learners. Colleges thought that this was having a very negative impact on both learners and on their own organisations.

Several colleges commented that schools were now keeping learners at their sites rather than referring them elsewhere and some had set up sixth forms in order to do this, due to the funding these learners now attracted. They felt that schools were not providing IAG about alternative routes in further education, and that learners who would be well suited to an apprenticeship were not being told that was an option:

'IAG has effectively failed now. The mantra was, at the beginning, when they cut Connexions, they were going to put careers guidance in the hands of schools, who know their learners best, but actually... they don't. My view would be that learners are probably less and less aware pre-16 of what's available than post-16. You've had the irony of a more complex, richer

menu of providers and curriculum post-16, and fewer and fewer people getting to read the menu.’ (General FE College)

‘The poor IAG in schools, that’s the reason many colleges struggle, because schools are holding onto students, when they shouldn’t really. If they were offering up what was the most appropriate tuition for that young person, they would in fact be sending them onto an apprenticeship or college but they use their position of influence to make sure young people stay at school, I suspect for short-term funding gains.’ (General FE College)

The college quoted immediately above also commented that while for some learners, a largely web-based careers service may be appropriate, for many it was not – they needed independent face-to-face IAG. As this was not readily available, many young people were not receiving advice about the full range of learning and career paths open to them. Hence, many young people and their parents were making important decisions without being well informed, particularly about vocational or technical routes:

‘I think it’s absolutely woeful in schools... Young people, parents are not well informed in terms of the options. The lack of vocational anything within schools means that very few people even know what vocation or technical options exist. We’ve almost got a generation of people, if we’re not careful, who we’ve blinkered. We’ve shut down their options because we haven’t exposed them to that wider thinking.’ (General FE College)

One college believed that the lack of careers advice now available for young people was impacting particularly on disadvantaged young people, who did not have access to support or guidance from their families:

‘A lot of our learners come from pretty disadvantaged, chaotic backgrounds. The lack of people actually in work in their families, frameworks, and lack of role models, lack of inspiration is really quite fundamental. Without knowing what’s out there, you can’t expect people to know a career path when they actually haven’t got a clue about what jobs are available and even the art of the possible. I think that exposure to the world of work, the exposure to career paths to new areas, all the rest of it, is very, very, sadly lacking.’ (General FE College)

Two colleges said that they had picked up the IAG role now that Connexions had gone. One had put on special IAG events following GCSE results, which they felt had been very positive, and they had also increased their electronic provision of IAG. Another college had brought in a package called Career Coach, which uses labour market and progression information, to assist them when recruiting learners:

'We can talk to learners about what role they're interested in and where their career will progress and how much salary. It's bringing all of that information together.' (General FE College)

Private providers

Private providers held similar views to those of colleges. Many had not any contact with the National Careers Service and/or had little knowledge of it. Few private providers commented on the National Careers Service but the general picture that emerged from those that did was that it was not having any useful impact:

'National Careers Service hasn't had any impact whatsoever. Connexions might have been rubbish but, actually, I really miss them. I don't think you can beat a face-to-face careers shop in places which have lots of NEET learners. I don't think the online, call-centre stuff is necessarily working.'
(Private Provider)

'The careers service was part of the educational reform and I think that has been an unmitigated disaster. I don't think there is sufficient understanding of what young people want and where they need to get it, or even older people to be fair. The careers service has always been weak in the UK but I think at the moment it is absolutely woeful.' (Private Provider)

Private providers that gave feedback on careers guidance issues felt that the current IAG provision made things very difficult for them as schools did not understand the private provider offer and parents did not understand that young people did not have to stay in school. Private providers, like general FE colleges, felt that the current IAG provision was not impartial and did not, therefore, give young people access to the full range of options available to them:

'I think careers guidance is just a complete disaster at the moment. Schools understand education and schools understand college. I think very, very few schools understand that you can also go to a private provider such as [name] and do an apprenticeship through them. I think that is just completely off their radar. So, I think there's a major flaw in careers advice for young people. I don't believe they're being offered impartial and full-picture advice and guidance.' (Private Provider)

'Parents still haven't got the message that a young person does not have to stay in school. That's the influencer. If school teachers are saying, 'Yes, it's all about university, and it's all about getting your degree, and you need to stay on to your sixth form,' and there's a funding system still that benefits schools for having a full and rich sixth form. It means young people don't go

and look for apprenticeships... They're missing on really good career opportunities.' (Private Provider)

Private providers believed that the increase in the school leaving age coupled with a lack of independent IAG had encouraged schools to keep students on at sixth form with a view to going to university rather than also telling them about vocational routes elsewhere. This was adversely affecting providers' recruitment of learners and one provider felt that employers were affected too, as the pool of potential apprentices had shrunk since the reforms:

'What's happened with the reforms is, instead of schools being able to guide people into whatever vocational area or academic area they want to go in... schools are profoundly telling young people that they have to go on to sixth form, and they have to go on to university.' (Private Provider)

One provider felt that there were now too many different organisations involved in IAG, and this was too confusing for schools and too time consuming for employers to engage with:

'Everybody is scrabbling to do exactly the same thing, or a very, very slow variation. So, for example, you've got National Careers Service as an offer... but there are about six or seven other organisations, just locally, all effectively doing exactly the same thing, packaging it slightly differently, and if I was a school and if I was an employer, I'd be pulling up the drawbridge now and just saying, 'You know what, I'll sort something else for myself, thank you.' (Private Provider)

'Other' providers

None of the other providers commented on these issues either due to not seeing it as important to them or because they did not know enough about the National Careers Service.

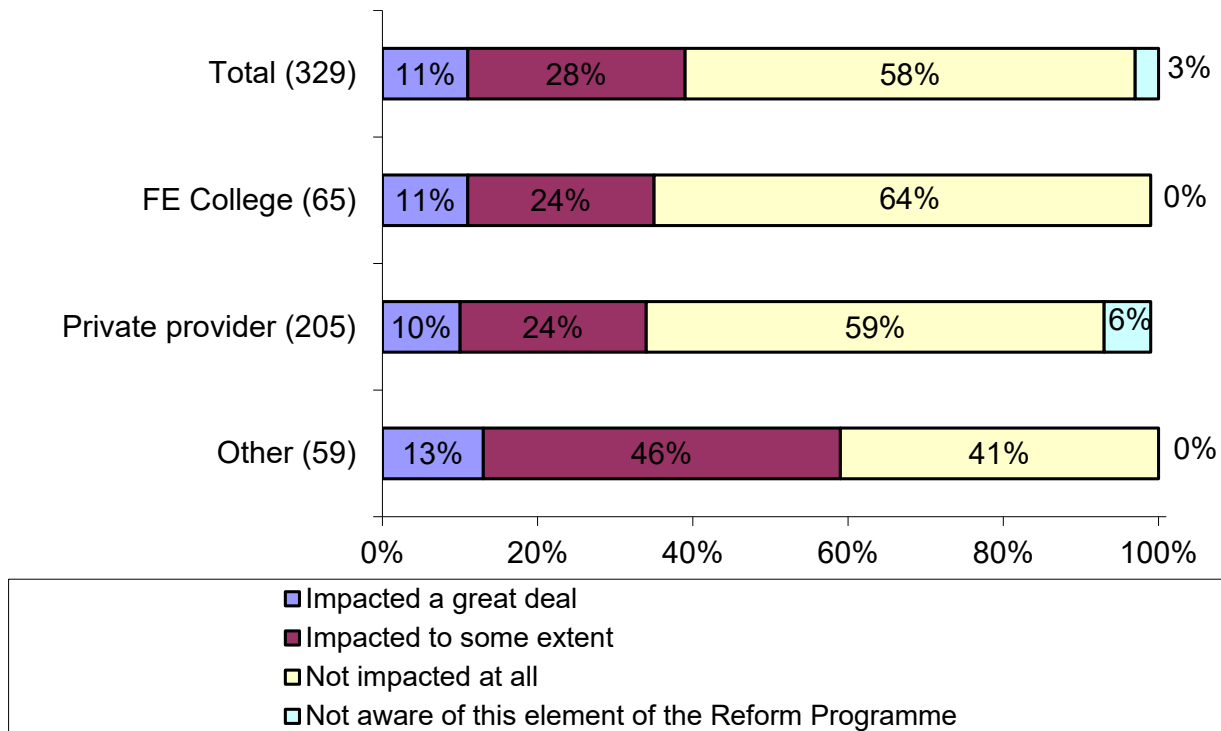
Impact of the changes

In the survey, all FE providers were asked for their views on the extent to which providing better careers advice through the introduction of the National Careers Service had impacted on their organisation (see **Figure 73**). More than half the providers (58%) reported no perceived impact of this change. More than a quarter (28%) reported some impact, while one in nine (11%) reported a great impact.

By provider type, FE colleges were less likely than private providers to report any impact of better careers advice (64% reported no impact, compared with 59%). However, there was little difference between the two types of provider in terms of the extent of any

impact. One in twenty private providers (6%) was unaware of this element of the Reform Programme. 'Other' providers were significantly more likely than average to report that this had impacted on their organisation to some extent (46%, compared with 28%).

Figure 74: Extent to which providing better careers advice through the introduction of the National Careers Service has impacted on providers' organisations



Q1A_7, all respondents, bases shown in brackets

In the survey, providers were also asked to describe the extent to which the changes made as a result of the reforms had improved the quality of IAG at their organisation.

Three in ten providers (31%) said the changes had improved its quality and 13% reduced its quality. Whilst somewhat counter intuitive as providers reported qualitatively that they were unhappy with changes to the wider IAG system, it may be argued that providers believe their own organisation's offer of IAG has been improved as providers were choosing to offer this themselves.

Appendix 1: Provider questionnaire

Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills: Evaluation of the FE Reform Programme 2015

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is and I'm calling from BMG Research, an independent research company, on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills. May I speak with INSERT NAME OF CONTACT?

IF NO NAMED CONTACT: May I speak with the Principal/Chief Executive (or their PA), IF RECEPTION WILL NOT PUT THROUGH or a senior member of staff who has been involved in making changes at your organisation as a result of the Government's FE Reform Programme for example a deputy or assistant principal?

IF ASKED The interview should be completed by a senior member of staff who has been involved in making changes at your organisation as a result of the Government's FE Reform Programme. We anticipate this will be the Principal/Chief Executive; however, they may want to speak to us to nominate another member of staff such as a deputy or assistant principal.

IF NEEDED OR WHEN SPEAKING TO THE APPROPRIATE CONTACT:

The Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) have commissioned a consortium of partners (including BMG Research, NIACE, and CFE Research) to evaluate the FE Reform Programme.

The evaluation aims to:

- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the overall impact of the programme on the sector including how and the extent to which providers have implemented changes.
- Provide an understanding of how partnerships between LEPs, local authorities and others have helped local provision evolve.
- Understand how providers react to changes in funding and new requirements in relation to Apprenticeships, especially the variable requirements within different frameworks.

All FE providers in England are being contacted and invited to take part in a telephone survey and we would like to invite you/NAMED CONTACT to take part on behalf of INSERT ORGANISATION NAME either now or at a convenient day/time. Those who take part will answer a range of questions on the reform's impacts and the reasons for these in a survey lasting approximately 25 minutes.

REASSURANCES IF NEEDED:

- Your co-operation will ensure that the views expressed are representative of all FE providers
- Whether or not you like the government's actions this is your chance to influence them – everyone's views will be taken into account
- All information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. Responses will not be attributed to any individual or provider. Results will be reported in the form of aggregated statistics.
- We work strictly within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct
- Contact at BMG Research is Elizabeth Davies if you would like to find out more about the survey (0121 333 6006)
- Contact at Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is James Davison on 02476 823482

INTERVIEWER TO RECORD OUTCOME:

Respondent agrees to take part	1
Transferred to a different respondent	2
Refused	3
Hard appointment	4
Soft appointment	5
Unobtainable number	6
Call back	7

INSERT DATABASE FLAG DB1=1 IF RESPONDENT HAS BEEN SELECTED FOR CFE/NIACE CASE STUDIES

INTERVIEWER TO RECORD RESPONDENT NAME

INTERVIEWER TO RECORD RESPONDENT JOB TITLE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ROLE

INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF CLARIFICATION OF THE TIME PERIOD OF INTEREST IS NEEDED AT ANY POINT IN THE INTERVIEW, ALL QUESTIONS ARE IN RELATION TO THE FE REFORM PROGRAMME AND ITS ASSOCIATED POLICY CHANGES WHICH WAS INTRODUCED OVER THE LAST 3-4 YEARS BY THE COALITION GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING THE PUBLICATION OF SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN LATE 2010.

Section 1: Changes to the provider offer

Firstly, we would like to understand the extent to which the different reforms have impacted on your organisation and the changes you have made as a result of these (although we note these do not sit in isolation and will discuss other wider changes, including changes to funding, during the questionnaire).

ASK ALL, OPTIONS TO BE ROTATED, SINGLE RESPONSE PER OPTION, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1A: To what extent have the following elements of the FE Reform Programme impacted your organisation?

	Impacted a great deal	Impacted to some extent	Not impacted at all	Not aware of this element of the Reform Programme	Don't know
The introduction of loans for people aged 24+, studying at levels 3 and 4	1	2	3	4	5
Reforms to the funding of 16-19 provision	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring learners who have not achieved a C or above in maths and English GCSEs continue studying for GCSEs in these subjects	1	2	3	4	5
Removing restrictions to enable new ways of working with other organisations	1	2	3	4	5
Freeing providers from central government control	1	2	3	4	5
Improving the quality of teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5
Providing better careers advice through the introduction of the National Careers Service	1	2	3	4	5
Simplification of the funding system	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, OPTIONS TO BE ROTATED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1B: Which of the following changes has your organisation made as a result of the FE Reform programme?

Targeted the recruitment of learners from different backgrounds than previously	1
Implemented practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning	2
Introduced changes to the types of provision offered	3
Changed business planning and strategy	4
Changed the ways in which business opportunities are identified	5
Made changes to organisation structure	6
Increased subcontracting arrangements	7
Introduced new approaches to partnership working	8
Introduced greater accountability to the local community	9
Changed the way with which you work with employers	10
Made changes to governance and management structures	11
Another way <i>Please specify</i> _____	12
SINGLE RESPONSE None of the above	13
SINGLE RESPONSE Don't know	14

ASK IF Q1B=3, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1C: Since the introduction of the FE Reform programme have the range of qualifications offered by your organisation changed?

Yes, a wider range of qualifications are offered	1
Yes, a smaller range of qualifications are offered	2
No changes	3

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE PER OPTION, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1D: How, if at all, has the profile of provision at your organisation changed since the introduction of the reforms?

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Not applicable	Don't know
Full-time learners	1	2	3	4	5
Part-time learners	1	2	3	4	5
Those on short courses	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1E: How, if at all, has the age profile of learners at your organisation changed since the introduction of the reforms?

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Not applicable	Don't know
Learners aged 16-18	1	2	3	4	5
Learners aged 19-23	1	2	3	4	5
Learners aged 24 or older	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1F: To what extent would you say the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds has changed at your organisation since the introduction of the reforms?

Increased a lot	Increased to some extent	Stayed the same	Decreased to some extent	Decreased a lot	Don't know
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ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1G: To what extent would you say the number of learners from the following working statuses has changed at your organisation since the introduction of the reforms?

	Increased a lot	Increased to some extent	Stayed the same	Decreased to some extent	Decreased a lot	Not applicable	Don't know
Learners who are employed - Thirty hours or more per week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners who are employed - Less than thirty hours per week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners who are not working	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners who are retired	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q1H: To what extent would you say the average level of the prior qualifications held by your organisation's learners has changed since the introduction of the reforms?

INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT

Increased a lot	Increased to some extent	Stayed the same	Decreased to some extent	Decreased a lot	Don't know
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ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE

Q2A: How do you seek to develop what provision is offered in your local area?

Q2B: Which of these is the main way you do this?

	Methods used (DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS)	Main method used (READ OUT OPTIONS CODED AND SELECT ONE)
Using local labour market information	1	1
Responding to demand from employers	2	2
Responding to demand from learners	3	3
Working with other partners (e.g. LEPs and employers)	4	4
Building on what has been done previously	5	5
Other <i>Please specify</i>	6	6
Don't know	7	7

ASK IF Q2A=4, SINGLE RESPONSE, STATEMENTS TO BE ROTATED AND SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3A: How important, if at all, is your relationship with the following partners in helping your organisation's understanding of local need?

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important	We do not work with such partners	Don't know
Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Jobcentre Plus	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local businesses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sector Skills Councils	1	2	3	4	5	6
Local and County authorities	1	2	3	4	5	6

Charities/third sector organisations	1	2	3	4	5	6
UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)	1	2	3	4	5	6
National Careers Service	1	2	3	4	5	6
Industry professional bodies	1	2	3	4	5	6
Chambers of Commerce	1	2	3	4	5	6
Higher Education Institutions	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF Q2A=4 & Q3A_1=<4, SINGLE RESPONSE, SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3B: To what extent do you think partnership working with the Local Enterprise Partnership(s) (LEP) has emerged as a result of the FE reforms?

To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Don't know
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ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3C: What strategies, if any, do you have for the future for enhancing partnership working with LEPs etc?

Attendance at meetings	1
Joint planning	2
Joint proposals	3
Joint statements of partnership	4
Other <i>Please specify</i> _____	5
SINGLE RESPONSE We do not have a strategy for enhancing community engagement and partnership	6
Don't know	7

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3D: How, if at all, does your organisation engage with employers?

Have employer advocates to communicate offer	1
Creating partnerships with other colleges and training providers	2
Creating collaborative partnerships with employers to explore business opportunities/joint funding proposals	3
Involving employers in the design of course content	4
Working with sector bodies and representatives	5
Through senior leadership (including governors) and networking	6
Working together to arrange work experience/work placements	7
Other <i>Please specify</i> _____	8
SINGLE RESPONSE We do not engage with employers, <i>please specify why this is?</i> _____	9
Don't know	10

ASK IF Q3D=<8, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, SHOW OPTIONS SELECTED IN Q3D, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3E: Which, if any, of these activities have you undertaken recently (in the last year) in order to develop links with employers?

Have employer advocates to communicate offer	1
Creating partnerships with other colleges and training providers	2
Creating collaborative partnerships with employers to explore business opportunities/joint funding proposals	3
Involving employers in the design of course content	4
Working with sector bodies and representatives	5
Through senior leadership (including governors) and networking	6
Working together to arrange work experience/work placements	7
Other <i>Please specify</i> _____	8
SINGLE RESPONSE All of the above	9
Don't know	10

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q3F: To what extent has your organisation you been involved in planning and delivering Higher Apprenticeships?

	Very involved	A little involved	Not at all involved
Planning	1	2	3
Delivering	1	2	3

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q4A: Has your organisation made changes to your pricing structures in response to reductions in budgets in recent years?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

ASK IF Q4A=1, OPEN RESPONSE

Q4B: In what ways have you adjusted your pricing structures?

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q4C: Which, if any, of the following strategies have you adopted to reduce overheads in response to reductions in budget in recent years?

Increased efficiencies in working practices	1
Reduced overall number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff	2
Reduced spending in non-essential areas <i>Please specify which</i> _____	3
Increased subcontracting where this achieves efficiencies	4
Reduced subcontracting where this does not achieves efficiencies	5
Other <i>Please specify</i> _____	6
SINGLE RESPONSE None of the above	7
Don't know	8

Section 2: Attitudes to the reforms

INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT: We would now like to ask you some questions about your views on the reforms and the impact they have had.

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, STATEMENTS TO BE ROTATED AND SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q5A: To what extent would you say the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved the quality of the following at your organisation? INTERVIEWER NOTE IF NEEDED: THESE QUESTIONS ARE TO BE ASKED 'ON BALANCE' AS DIFFERENT CHANGES MAY HAVE HAD DIFFERENT IMPACTS – THE RESPONDENT CAN EXPAND ON THIS IF WANTED IN THE OPEN QUESTIONS 4B-5

	Reduced quality a large amount	Reduced quality to some extent	No change in quality	Improved quality to some extent	Improved quality a large amount	Don't know
A. Teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. Information, advice and guidance	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. Provision overall	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK ALL, OPEN RESPONSE, NONE=98, DON'T KNOW=99

Q5B: Are there any other specific ways you would like to mention in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have improved quality at your organisation?

ASK ALL, OPEN RESPONSE, NONE=98, DON'T KNOW=99

Q5C: Are there any other specific ways you would like to mention in which the changes made as a result of the reforms have reduced quality at your organisation?

ASK IF Q5AC=1/2/4/5, OPEN RESPONSE

Q6: Why do you think these changes have had this impact on the quality of provision overall?

ASK IF Q5AC=4/5, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q7: What benefits have these improvements in quality had for learners?

Increased number of learners progressing into further learning	1
Increased number of learners progressing into work	2
Increased learner retention	3
Increased achievement of qualifications	4
Other <i>Please specify</i>	5
Don't know	6

ASK IF Q5AC=1/2, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q8: What impacts have these reductions in quality had for learners?

Decrease in the number of learners progressing into further learning	1
Decrease in the number of learners progressing into work	2
Increased level of drop-out	3
Increased number of learners not achieving qualifications	4
Other <i>Please specify</i>	5
Don't know	6

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, STATEMENTS TO BE ROTATED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q9: INTERVIEWER TO READ OUT: The following question is about ensuring greater freedom and flexibility for providers. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is very negative and 5 is very positive) to what extent do you think the following policy changes have had a positive or negative impact on providers' ability to respond to reforms?

	1 – Very negative	2 – Quite negative	3 – Neither positive or negative	4 – Quite positive	5 – Very positive	Not applicable	Don't know
Reduction in the Adult Skills Budget (ASB)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Introduction of minimum contract levels for subcontracting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reduction in top down controls	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Simplification to bureaucracy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Simplification to funding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q10A: How, if at all, has your organisation utilised technology to a greater or different extent over recent years?

Increased the ways in which learners can access resources from multiple platforms, devices and locations	1
Increased the availability of provider owned hardware for learners	2
Increased provision to enable learners to source their own devices	3
Increased provision to enable learners to use their own devices	4
Increased the use of provider owned or licensed enabled platforms in delivering learning	5
Increased the use of public platforms or freely available resources in delivering learning	6
Used technology to deliver teaching in an innovative, creative or transformative model	7
SINGLE RESPONSE: Our organisation has not utilised technology to a greater or different extent over recent years	8
Don't know	9

ASK IF Q10A=<8, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q10B: Why has your organisation chosen to use technology in this way?

To enable learners to access learning at a time and/or place convenient for them	1
To enable better communication between the provider and the learner	2
To make the learning more accessible to learners with specific educational needs and disabilities	3
To widen learning beyond the classroom	4
To generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for staff	5
To generally improve the experience of learning and teaching for learners	6
To improve the cost effectiveness of delivering learning	7
To meet the targets recommended by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG)	8
Other, please specify_____	9
Don't know	10

ASK IF Q10A=<8, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, OPTIONS TO BE ROTATED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q10C: Which, if any, of the following challenges have you had in terms of ensuring the competency of staff to respond to changes in the use of technology:

Recruiting appropriately skilled staff	1
Ensuring quality	2
Training existing staff	3
Balancing requirements with staff time/workload	4
The costs associated with training and developing staff	5
The costs associated with recruiting staff	6
Other, please specify _____	7
Single response: None of the above	8
Single response: Don't know	9

ASK IF Q10A=<8, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q11A: Has your organisation accessed the Innovation Code to draw down non-standard learning funding for digital activity?

Yes – for all	1
Yes – for some <i>Please specify %</i> INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	2
No	3
Don't know	4

ASK IF Q11A=1/2, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, DO NOT READ OUT OPTIONS

Q12: What, if any, impacts has your use of the Innovation Code had on your organisation and its learners?

Helped lead to the development of new qualifications	1
Helped lead to the development of new partnerships with employers	2
Helped lead to the development of new partnerships with other organisations such as Jobcentre Plus	3
Helped lead to the development of new subcontracting arrangements	4
Other impacts Please specify _____	5
No impacts	6
Don't know	7

ASK IF Q10A=<8, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q13: What impact has the use of technology had on the number of guided learner hours at your organisation?

Increased significantly	1
Increased slightly	2
Made no difference	3
Decreased slightly	4
Decreased significantly	5
Don't know	6

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q14: How effective do you feel the use of technology has been...?

	Not at all effective	Not very effective	Quite effective	Very effective	Don't know
In the classroom	1	2	4	5	6
On the whole learning experience	1	2	4	5	6

ASK ALL UNLESS Q1A_1=4, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q15A: What, if any, impact(s) have you seen following the introduction of loans for learners?

Increase in the number of learners. <i>Please specify what % increase</i> ____ INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	1
Decrease in the number of learners. <i>Please specify what % decrease</i> ____ INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	2
No change	3
Don't know	4

ASK IF Q15A=1/2, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q15B: How, if at all have the loans for learners impacted on the number of learners undertaking the following types of courses at your organisation?

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Not applicable	Don't know
UNLESS Q1D_1=4 Full-time courses	1	2	3	4	5
UNLESS Q1D_2=4 Part-time courses	1	2	3	4	5
UNLESS Q1D_3=4 Short courses	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL UNLESS Q1A_1=4, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, STATEMENTS TO BE ROTATED AND SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q15C: What is the impact on people who have taken up a loan, has it increased or decreased these learners'...:

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Don't know
Progression into further learning	1	2	3	4
Progression into work	1	2	3	4
Retention	1	2	3	4
Achievement of qualifications	1	2	3	4

Section 3: Wider influences on changes

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, STATEMENTS TO BE ROTATED AND SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q16: To what extent do you think the following additional influences have contributed to any reported changes?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Don't know	ONLY USE AS OPTION FOR 'OTHER 1-3' Not applicable
The localism agenda	1	2	3	4	5
Qualifications reform	1	2	3	4	5
The introduction of the FE Commissioner	1	2	3	4	5
Other (1), please specify_____	1	2	3	4	5
Other (2), please specify_____	1	2	3	4	5
Other (3), please specify_____	1	2	3	4	5
Don't know	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, SCALE TO BE REVERSED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q17: On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is 'not at all' and 5 is 'a great deal' to what extent have you engaged with the following:

	1 – not at all				5 – a great deal	Don't know
Employer Ownership Pilots	1	2	3	4	5	
Apprenticeship Trailblazers	1	2	3	4	5	

ASK ALL, MULTIPLE RESPONSE, OPTIONS TO BE ROTATED, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q18: Which, if any, of the following challenges have you had in responding to the Government's ambition to promote GCSEs as the national standard of English and maths:

Recruiting teaching staff	1
Ensuring quality	2
Training existing staff	3

Other, please specify_____	4
None of the above	5
Don't know	6

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q19: How if at all do you expect further changes in budget to impact on your provision:

A. Will the number of courses offered:

Increase: If so by how many___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	1
Decrease: If so by how many___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	2
Stay the same	3

B. Will the qualification levels offered by your organisation change?

Yes, a wider range of qualification levels will be offered: If so how many more ___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	1
Yes, a smaller range of qualification levels will be offered: If so how many less ___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	2
The same amount of qualifications levels will be offered but a different combination to previously	3
No change at all	4

C. Will the qualification types offered by your organisation change?

Yes, a wider range of qualification types will be offered: If so how many more ___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	1
Yes, a smaller range of qualification types will be offered: If so how many less ___? INCLUDE OPTION FOR DK	2
The same amount of qualifications types will be offered but a different combination to previously	3
No change at all	4

D. Will the number of guided learning hours offered to learners change?

Yes, increase: If so by approximately how many___?	1
Yes, decrease: If so by approximately how many___?	2
Stay the same	3

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q20A: How, if at all, do you expect the age profile of learners at your organisation to change in the next 4 years in the following areas as a result of the reforms?

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Not applicable	Don't know
UNLESS Q1E_1=4 Learners aged 16 to 18	1	2	3	4	5
UNLESS Q1E_2=4 Learners aged 19 to 23	1	2	3	4	5
UNLESS Q1E_3=4 Learners aged 24 or older	1	2	3	4	5

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q20B: To what extent do you expect the number of learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds to change in the next 4 years as a result of the reforms?

Increase a lot	Increase to some extent	Stay the same	Decrease to some extent	Decrease a lot	Don't know
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ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q20C: To what extent would you expect the number of learners from the following working statuses to change in the next 4 years as a result of the reforms?

	Increase a lot	Increase to some extent	Stay the same	Decrease to some extent	Decrease a lot	Not applicable	Don't know
UNLESS Q1G_1=6 Learners who are employed - Thirty hours or more per week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
UNLESS Q1G_2=6 Learners who are employed - Less than thirty hours per week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
UNLESS Q1G_3=6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Learners who are not working							
UNLESS Q1G_4=6 Learners who are retired	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE, READ OUT OPTIONS

Q20D: To what extent would you expect the average level of the prior qualifications held by your organisation's learners to change as a result of the reforms?

Increased a lot	Increased to some extent	Stayed the same	Decreased to some extent	Decreased a lot	Don't know
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ASK ALL EXCEPT WHERE DB1=1, SINGLE RESPONSE

Q21: Would you be willing to take part in a further face to face in-depth interview which would involve one of our researchers visiting your organisation?

Yes <i>Interviewer to collect details inc possible dates for visits and preferred contact details</i>	1
No	2

ASK ALL, SINGLE RESPONSE

Q22: To help us understand more about the impact the FE Reform Programme has had, the research partners (BMG, CFE, NIACE) would like to match details about your organisation from the ILR data to your survey responses. To do this we will use your organisation name and Unique Reference Number. No data from this survey will be shared with any other parties and your survey data will not be added to BIS/ILR administrative data. Both BMG Research, CFE, and NIACE have strict protocols in place to protect your information. Are you happy for us to use your data in this way?

Yes	1
No	2

ASK ALL, OPEN RESPONSE

Q22: Would you like to make any further comments about anything we have discussed today?

INTERVIEWER TO THANK AND REPEAT ASSURANCES IF NECESSARY.

Appendix 2: Stakeholder topic guide

Introduction and briefing

The Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) have commissioned a consortium of partners (including BMG Research, NIACE, and CFE Research) to evaluate the FE Reform Programme.

The evaluation aims to:

- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the overall impact FE Reforms have had on the sector including how and the extent to which providers have implemented changes as a result of the reforms.
- Provide an understanding of how provision has evolved within the changing governance that allowed for more local planning in partnership with LEPs and local authorities.
- Understand how providers are managing and planning for the changing and differential funding regime and new requirements within Apprenticeships, especially the variable requirements within different Apprenticeship frameworks.

In addition to interviews with stakeholders like yourself the evaluation includes: analysis of secondary data; a survey of 650 providers; and qualitative depth interviews with representatives from 50 providers.

As a key stakeholder in the sector who will have an interest in the findings of the evaluation the interview today will explore your views on the FE reform programme and its aims and objectives, how providers have responded, and the impact it has had; as well as any key issues you believe should be explored as part of the wider evaluation. The interview will last no more than 60 minutes – *interviewer to note that in some instances questions may need to be tailored or prioritised by respondent to ensure interview do not last longer than planned.*

This topic guide will be used flexibly to ensure respondents are asked questions of relevance to them and their role and ensure interviewers are able to pursue emerging lines of enquiry.

Confidentiality: All information you provide will be treated confidentially. We will not identify any individuals or disclose the personal details of those who take part. Your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence as observed by standards determined by the Market Research Society.

- Views stated are not attributable to individuals and the more open and honest you can be the better.
- Quotes from the discussions may be used in the research report as a way of bringing the findings to life. However these quotes would not identify any individual. This is in line with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.
- There are no right or wrong answers: it's just your views or opinions that count.

Recording: we would like to audio-record the discussion for the purposes of accurately capturing all the information you share with us. The audio will be used for analysis purposes only and will not be shared with anyone outside of BMG research.

Provide opportunity for respondent to ask any questions.

Seek permission to audio-record.

About the respondent

Interviewer to ask the respondent to introduce themselves and their role:

1. In what ways have you and your organisation been involved in the FE Reforms Programme?

Interviewer to probe for:

- Involvement at the outset in terms of helping to set priorities and feed in to policy etc.
- Providing support to FE providers to implement or respond to changes as a result of the reforms.
- Any other involvement.

Understanding of the FE Reform Programme

2. How would you describe the FE Reform programme? *Interviewer to probe for:*

- What do you see as the most, and conversely, the least important of the reforms?
- What do you see as the core purpose of the reforms? Why were they needed?

3. What is your understanding of the different elements of the FE Reform programme and what they set out to achieve? *Interviewer to probe for knowledge in the following areas (interviewer to refer to further details on reform areas if required), but may focus on the reforms and underpinning policies of most relevance to the respondent/those they have most knowledge of as needed:*

- Students at the heart of the FE and skills system
- First-class advice delivered by the National Careers Service
- A ladder of opportunity of comprehensive Vocational Education and Training programmes
- Excellence in Teaching and Learning
- Relevant and focused learning programmes and qualifications
- Strategic Governance for a dynamic FE sector
- Freedoms and Flexibilities
- Funding priorities through a simplified funding system (including the prioritisation of apprenticeship provision)
- Empowered students making informed choices
- Global FE

4. To what extent do you believe the reforms made and the policies underpinning them have been the right or conversely the wrong ones? Why do you think this is?
5. What further changes, if any, do you think would have supported the aims and objectives of the programme? In what ways would these have worked?

Implementing the FE Reform Programme

6. What changes are you aware of which providers have made in response to FE reforms?

Interviewer to explore for each of the reform areas the respondent is aware of/involved in and probe for both anticipated and unanticipated changes. Interviewer to probe for:

- Changes to learning offer
- Targeting specific learners / demographics
- Change in administrative practices

- Changes in teaching and learning practices
 - Identification of different funding streams
 - Changes to apprenticeship and ASB provision e.g. how providers have chosen to use a reducing ASB for competing priorities
 - Change in employer engagement and responsiveness approach
 - Changes in how they work with and respond to local communities and needs
7. What approaches are you aware of, if any, that providers have taken to making these changes?
 8. Are there any elements of the reform programme which have been of particular importance to facilitate change overall?
 9. Have any of these changes been particularly challenging for providers?
 - In what ways?
 - How, if at all, have these challenges been overcome?
 10. Are there any examples of changes that have been made which you think have been particularly successful, or conversely unsuccessful?
 - What are these?
 - What conditions have facilitated these?
 11. To what extent do you think the changes providers have made have met the aims and objectives of the FE reform programme? Why is this?
 12. To what extent have there been differences in the approaches taken by different provider types? What were these and how has their context affected this?

Impact of the FE Reform Programme

13. What types of impacts do you think FE Reforms have had on:
 - The offer made by providers
 - Learners (in particular the type of learners engaging)
 - Teaching and learning
 - Relationships with employers
 - Provider structure and processes in general
 - The FE sector overall
14. To what extent were these impacts expected or not expected? Why is this?
15. Which elements of the changes made do you think have helped providers to achieve these impacts and how have they achieved this? *Interviewer to explore each of the impacts areas previously discussed.*
16. To what extent do you think the changes made have met the objectives of the FE Reform programme? Why is this?
17. Are there any areas in which you do not think the FE Reforms programme has not had its intended impact? *Interviewer to explore:*
 - What areas of these?
 - Why do you think it has not achieved this impact?
 - To what extent do you think this impact will be achieved over time?

18. What do you think will be the main legacy of the FE Reforms programme?

Wrap Up

- Moderator to check for any final closing comments
- Repeat assurances regarding confidentiality
- Thank and close

Appendix 3: Provider topic guide

Introduction and briefing

The Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) have commissioned a consortium of partners (including BMG Research, NIACE, and CFE Research) to evaluate the FE Reform Programme.

INFORMATION IN ITALICS ONLY TO BE USED IF REQUIRED BY INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENTS

The evaluation aims to:

- *Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the overall impact FE Reforms have had on the sector including how and the extent to which providers have implemented changes as a result of the reforms.*
- *Provide an understanding of how provision has evolved within the changing governance that allowed for more local planning in partnership with LEPs and local authorities.*
- *Understand how providers are managing and planning for the changing and differential funding regime and new requirements within Apprenticeships, especially the variable requirements within different Apprenticeship frameworks.*

In addition to in-depth interviews with providers like this one and the survey your organisation kindly took part in, the research also includes: in-depth interviews with key stakeholders; analysis of secondary data; and further research looking specifically at work that has been undertaken to implement the reforms requiring all students in state-funded provision who have not achieved a GCSE grade A-C in English and/or maths to continue to study towards them as a part of their 16-19 programme.*

The purpose of our interview today is to explore in more depth your views on the FE reform programme and its aims and objectives, how your organisation has responded to the reforms and your reflections on this process, the impact the reforms have had and why you think they have had this effect; as well as any key issues you believe should be explored as part of the wider evaluation. The interview will last no more than 60-90 minutes – *interviewer to note that in some instances questions may need to be tailored or prioritised by respondent to ensure interviews do not last longer than planned and to ensure topics most relevant to the respondent are explored in detail.*

This topic guide will be used flexibly to ensure respondents are asked questions of relevance to them and their role and ensure interviewers are able to pursue emerging lines of enquiry.

Confidentiality: All information you provide will be treated confidentially. We will not identify any individuals or disclose the details of those who take part. Your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence as observed by standards determined by the Market Research Society.

- Views stated are not attributable to individuals and the more open and honest you can be the better.

- Quotes from the discussions may be used in the research report as a way of bringing the findings to life. However these quotes would not identify any individual. This is in line with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.
- There are no right or wrong answers: it's just your views or opinions that count.

Recording: we would like to audio-record the discussion for the purposes of accurately capturing all the information you share with us. The audio will be used for analysis purposes only and will not be shared with anyone outside of BMG research.

***Provide opportunity for respondent to ask any questions.
Seek permission to audio-record.***

About the respondent

Interviewer to ask the respondent to introduce themselves and their role:

19. To start off, can you please tell me about your role and how your responsibilities have related to the implementation of changes as a result of the FE Reform programme? *Interviewer to probe for:*
- Involvement at the outset in terms of helping to respond and set priorities for the organisation.
 - Being directly involved in implementing changes in their organisation.
 - Any other involvement.

Understanding of the FE Reform Programme

20. How would you describe the FE Reform programme? *Interviewer to probe for:*
- What do you see as the most, and conversely, the least important of the reforms? *Which have had the most/least impact on the organisation?*
 - What do you see as the core purpose of the reforms? Why were they needed?
21. To what extent do you believe the reforms made and the policies underpinning them have been the right or conversely the wrong ones? Why do you think this is?

Implementing the FE Reform Programme

22. Can you describe the changes you have made in your organisation as a result of the FE Reform Programme? *Interviewer to explore for each of the changes mentioned 1) why they chose to make the changes they did, and 2) what the desired impact was. IF TIME IS LIMITED OR RESPONDENT THINKS THE CHANGES ARE TOO NUMEROUS, ASK THEM TO DESCRIBE WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE THE MAIN CHANGES AT THEIR ORGANISATION. Interviewer to probe for:*
- Changes to learning offer
 - Targeting specific learners / demographics
 - Change in administrative practices
 - Changes in teaching and learning practices

- Changes in financial planning e.g. changes in pricing structure; reducing overheads; identification of different funding streams
 - Changes to apprenticeship and ASB provision e.g. how providers have chosen to use a reducing ASB for competing priorities
 - Changed the way in which they use technology
 - Change in employer engagement and responsiveness approach
 - Changes in how they work with and respond to local communities and needs
 - Changes to the range and type of partners they work with
23. How, if at all, did they use data/existing examples/advice from colleagues and partner organisations in order to inform their decisions when making changes as a result of the FE Reform Programme?
24. Are there any changes you have made as a result of the FE Reform Programme which you consider to be of particular importance or influence in shaping your organisation's response? Why is this?
25. Have any of the changes your organisation has made been particularly challenging to implement?
- If so:*
- Which and in what ways?
 - How, if at all, have these challenges been overcome?
- If not:*
- What measures has your organisation got (or put) in place to reduce the risk of facing challenges when implementing change as a result of the FE Reform Programme?
26. How effective have you been in addressing any barriers you have faced?
- What factors have helped them overcome barriers and which factors hinder progress? Why is that?
 - What advice would you give to other organisations facing the same challenges?
27. Are there any examples of changes that have been made at your organisation for which you believe the implementation process has been particularly successful, or conversely unsuccessful?
- What are these?
 - What conditions have facilitated these?
 - What, if any, external support or partnership working has been received to enable this?
28. IF SURVEY RESPONSE INDICATES THEY HAVE NOT USED THE INNOVATION CODE BUT THEY HAVE MADE TECHNOLOGY RELATED CHANGES: For what reasons have you not used the Innovation Code to support the changes you have made relating to the use of technology in your organisation? Was an application made but not been successful? Did you receive any feedback on this and what was it?
29. To what extent do you think the changes you have made have met the aims and objectives of the FE reform programme? Why is this?
30. To what extent do you think factors specific to your organisation's context affects how you have chosen to implement changes as a result of the FE Reform Programme?

31. IF NOT MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY How, if at all, have you worked with local or national partners (including employers) to develop your offer? What partners have you worked with and how/why? What have you found makes this relationship effective or not effective?
32. IF NOT MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY How, if at all are you developing or formalising relationships with employers e.g. are they becoming involved in any employer focussed initiatives (such as Apprenticeship Trailblazers and Employer Ownership Pilots, and Higher Apprenticeships)? What do you see to be the benefits of this?
33. How is your organisation planning for the changing and differential funding regime and new requirements within Apprenticeships e.g. through Apprenticeship Trailblazers? Why have you chosen to respond in this way? Have you experienced or do you expect to experience any challenges in this? How do you intend to respond to any challenges?

Impact of the FE Reform Programme

INTERVIEWER TO USE THESE QUESTIONS TO BUILD ON FINDINGS FROM Q4 AS APPROPRIATE FOR THE PARTICIPANT (ENSURING SUFFICIENT COVERAGE OF THE QUESTIONS BUT AVOIDING REPETITION).

QUESTIONS 15-22 SHOULD EACH BE EXPLORED FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- The extent to which they believe these impacts to be a result of changes made as a result of the FE Reform Programme? Why this is and why they think it has had this impact?
 - Which specific element(s) of the reforms they think led to this impact? Why is this?
 - To what extent these impacts were expected or not expected? Why is this?
 - The extent to which they believe these changes have led to an improvement in each specific factor/feature at their organisation?
34. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen in the profile of your learners over the past few years? *Interviewer to explore: demographics; working status; attitudes to training; types of courses, training areas/courses of interest.*
 35. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen in your organisation's learning offer over the past few years? *Interviewer to explore: type of courses offered, level of courses offered, and nature of courses offered.*
 36. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen on teaching and learning in your organisation over the past few years?
 37. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen on your organisation's relationships with employers over the past few years?
 38. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen on quality of the learning experience in your organisation over the past few years?
 39. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen on your organisation's use of technology over the past few years?
 40. What are the main impacts of the changes (if any) that you have seen on your organisation's structure and processes over the past few years?

41. What do you perceive to be the main impacts of the changes made as a result of the FE Reform programme on the FE sector overall?
42. Which elements of the changes do you think have had the most impact on providers? Are these positive or negative impacts? Why do you think they have had this impact?
43. What other competing factors have most impacted on providers' ability to respond to the FE Reform Programme and why? Are these positive or negative impacts? Why do you think they have had this impact?

Views on the FE Reform Programme

44. To what extent do you think the changes made have met the objectives of the FE Reform programme? Why is this?
45. ASK IF NOT COVERED IN PREVIOUS QUESTIONS (IN PARTICULAR Q3) Do you think your organisation would have desired or made such changes without the influence and implementation of the FE Reform Programme? Why is this?
46. Are there any areas in which you do not think the FE Reforms programme has not had its intended impact? *Interviewer to explore:*
 - What areas of these?
 - Why do you think it has not achieved this impact?
 - To what extent do you think this impact will be achieved over time?
47. What do you think will be the main legacy of the FE Reforms programme?
48. What further changes, if any, do you think would have supported the aims and objectives of the programme? In what ways would these have worked?
49. What further changes do you plan to make to your provision in the next few years? Why have you chosen these types of further changes? How will you go about making these changes and what impact do you expect them to have? *Interviewer to probe for strategies for engaging with communities, employers, and other partners.*

Wrap Up

50. To help us understand more about the impact the FE Reform Programme has had, the research partners (BMG, CFE, NIACE) would like to match details about your organisation from the ILR data to your interview responses. To do this we will use your organisation name and Unique Reference Number. No information from this interview will be shared with any other parties and your responses will not be added to BIS/ILR administrative data. Both BMG Research, CFE, and NIACE have strict protocols in place to protect your information. Are you happy for us to use your interview responses in this way?
 - Moderator to check for any final closing comments
 - Repeat assurances regarding confidentiality
 - Thank and close

Appendix 4: English and maths case studies

learndirect

About learndirect

learndirect is the UK's largest provider of skills, training and employment services. It has three main delivery divisions: adult skills; employability; and, apprenticeships. The latter includes the level 3 Early Years Educator Apprenticeship which contains the new GCSE requirements. For the last year **learndirect** has been piloting the delivery of GCSE English and maths to learners enrolled on the Early Years Educator Framework and adult learners solely studying for a GCSE.

Effect of the English and maths reforms

In their initial consultation response, **learndirect** raised potential concerns about the effect of the English and maths reforms on its business model, learners themselves, and employers who are particularly interested in the Early Years Apprenticeship Framework.

learndirect delivers learning and assessment through a distance learning model. It is set up to deliver flexible training, not in a school or college, and to start and finish when learners are ready. In comparison to the Functional Skills, the GCSE offer creates practical and administrative challenges. These include:

- The limited number of assessment windows means **learndirect** has had to extend the length of its Framework to tie into these assessment periods;
- The guided learning hours of GCSEs have been four times greater than Functional Skills;
- The added cost of registration and examination fees for learners;
- The paper-based system means **learndirect** has to post out test papers rather than learners being able to download them; and
- The inability to undertake electronic GCSE exams means **learndirect** has to facilitate controlled assessment and incur costs for premises and invigilators hired from schools or colleges with the facilities to meet the security requirements necessary.

With no commensurate increase in funding to cover the additional costs incurred **learndirect** has been running at a loss in delivering GCSE English and maths to date.

Since piloting the reforms within the level 3 Early Years Educator Apprenticeship, **learndirect** has experienced a number of negative responses from its learners. These include: negative associations about their previous experiences of these GCSEs; perceptions the generic exam questions are irrelevant to their vocational learning; and, loss of motivation as they are older learners having to sit exams with schools/colleges alongside younger learners.

learndirect believes the new English and maths requirements of the level 3 Early Years Educator Apprenticeship and the inflexibility of the assessment windows are not welcomed by employers in that sector. Supposedly they do not appreciate the added value of the GCSE qualification compared to Functional Skills for their employees and are frustrated about the apprentices having to wait for only two points in the year to take the GCSE exams before they can be employed. **learndirect** report that ‘it’s putting employers off putting their learners through the [...] Apprenticeship. Employers are saying that they can’t wait’ as the demand for vocationally qualified workers is both immediate and intense.

Another potential concern highlighted by **learndirect** in its initial consultation response was the potential gap in knowledge between teaching Functional Skills and GCSE. Staff felt this could lead to confidence issues for tutors making it difficult to up-skill the existing workforce and yet it would be challenging to recruit qualified teachers into the sector when schools offer more competitive salary packages. In addition the ability to teach GCSE to a cohort of Early Years apprentices located across the country outside of an online delivery model was raised as an issue.

Actions taken

learndirect is implementing a number of changes in response to the GCSE reforms to meet the needs of its business model and learners as best as possible. These include:

- Developing a process of *hot housing* its 400 learners in key locations across England. Where controlled assessments are required it covers learners’ travel expenses and provides external invigilators so they can take place at a set venue at a set time;
- Designing a GCSE diagnostic tool as part of their enrolment criteria for the Apprenticeship. Prospective learners sit English and maths entrants’ diagnostics to ensure that those individuals accepted onto the Framework have the potential to meet the requirements of the GCSE exams.
- Working with their Awarding Body to develop proposals for solutions to the challenging assessment criteria for exam centres, such as the possibility of delivering online papers and a variety of assessment centre options.

Perceived impact of changes

The diagnostic enrolment tool **learndirect** has developed for the Early Years Educator Apprenticeship Framework will enable staff to focus support on those learners who have the potential to achieve the required pass grade. Learners who are rejected for the Framework will be referred to level 2 Functional Skills courses and advised to reapply when they are ready.

A negative impact of the changes made to the level 3 Early Years Educator Apprenticeship is that some learners have left the Framework. The learners have not seen the value of the qualification and have found the time commitment to study it in a

nine month period too great in addition to their vocational courses and existing jobs. Furthermore in some instances employers have terminated these learners' contracts as the Framework is critical to their job.

Future plans

learndirect seeks support to overcome some unresolved challenges. Firstly, additional support in up-skilling existing tutors to deliver the new GCSE programmes, such as the AS-Level maths elements due to be incorporated into the syllabus; a forum to regularly meet with key stakeholders to discuss concerns and issues, for example the necessity of establishing exam centres; and, better flexibility for learners to make relevant qualification choices that meet their own needs such as being able to upload work for assessment remotely.

Practical solutions to the issues raised would enable learndirect to deliver a more effective, relevant and cost effective GCSE offer for its learners. Without such assistance however, learndirect will have to take a serious and pragmatic look at whether it continues to offer GCSEs for adults at all as there is strong consensus that it will not be a profit making business. Not continuing with the GCSE would mean withdrawing from delivery of the Apprentices too, which would have a significant impact as learndirect is one of the largest providers delivering the Early Years Educator Framework.

City and Islington College

About City and Islington College

City and Islington College is a large general FE provider in the London Borough of Islington and runs on a centre model. Each of its five centres has a particular specialism of courses and qualifications and its own discrete community of teachers and students. In addition some members of management staff have cross-college responsibilities.

For the last two years the college has delivered study programmes which have included English and maths GCSEs for students who got a D grade in one of the subjects. However until now, those students who attained a GCSE D grade in both subjects studied GCSE level for one and Functional Skills for the other. From September 2015 'double D' students will be taught both subjects at GCSE level to meet the condition of funding.

Effect of English and maths reforms

The impact of the GCSE reforms on learners had been of principal concern for the college in their earlier consultation on the reforms. Staff believe learners' motivation will be challenged further by the time commitment required by the reforms. The number of learning hours for students will increase as they continue their English and/or maths GCSE in addition to their core subject.

Since teaching English and maths GCSE within its 16-19 study programmes, the college quickly realised that the existing quality of its maths teachers was not sufficient to effectively teach to the new level and had a negative impact on learner attendance. Furthermore the college did not have the supply of English and maths teachers to meet the demand of students without a GCSE A*-C grade needing to continue their studies at this level.

The college has experienced a number of administrative challenges since teaching English or maths to students who did not attain at least a C at GCSE. It has been difficult to provide and coordinate the additional teaching time and classroom space required. The administrative task of timetabling is perceived as being more tasking due to the lack of knowledge about the size and profile of the new intake of students for 2015/16.

Actions taken

City and Islington College has invested a significant amount of time and money in making changes to its English and maths teaching to implement the GCSE reforms. The college is addressing student motivation and the challenge of their demanding timetables in a number of ways. These include: developing a collaborative approach between some vocational tutors and English or maths teachers, whereby the former promote the value of these subjects within their courses and encourage students to attend their GCSE

lessons; and, providing additional support to the most vulnerable learners studying English and maths GCSEs in the form of daily workshops where the students' needs are identified and addressed through extra tutoring.

The college has increased its staff capacity and teaching quality, in particular for maths, to meet the increased demand for students needing to continue their English and/or maths GCSE studies and address the challenges of learner motivation as well as their rates of attendance and retention. Actions it has taken include: employing senior staff with cross-college responsibilities to oversee the quality of the English and maths provision across its multiple centres; providing existing maths teachers with the CPD opportunities to improve their skills by investing in coaching and mentoring; and, implementing a more rigorous recruitment process to ensure the maths teachers deliver engaging lessons and can motivate disengaged students. In addition, the college is working with the ETF on a maths graduate scheme led by the Institute of Education where maths PGCE students are able to undertake their placement at City and Islington College. The pool of good quality maths teachers wishing to in FE colleges however is still limited.

The college has also made a number of administrative changes to address some of the challenges the reforms presented. For example, it has invested in its management information systems to most effectively and efficiently gain information about future students' English and maths GCSE grades from the ILR so it can plan the resources and timetabling of English and maths provision for each new intake.

The college's Centre for Health, Social and Child Care in spring 2015 held a forum with the awarding body for their Early Years apprenticeship framework. The aim of this event was to help increase employers' awareness of changes to the GCSE English and maths requirements of Early Years apprentices.

Perceived impact of changes

A number of positive impacts of the changes City and Islington College has already made to its English and maths provision are evident. Firstly, the message about the importance of English and maths to future learning and employment opportunities appears to be getting through to the pupils taking their GCSEs in the summer of 2015. Research conducted by a senior member of staff with students who wish to enrol at the Centre for Applied Science and Centre for Business, Arts and Technology in 2015 suggests they better understand the value of the qualifications.

Secondly, the changes and interventions City and Islington College has made to its teaching staff, particularly maths, has improved the quality of teaching and this has resulted in higher attendance by students in their maths classes.

Thirdly, students studying on the Early Years apprenticeship framework appear to be progressing further and attaining a higher level of English and maths than their tutors

would have originally anticipated. The GCSE reforms to the apprenticeship are therefore enabling the apprentices to attain a higher level than previously.

Future plans

The next step for the college to improve teaching will be through the integration of English and maths within the students' vocational studies. The college aims to achieve this by strengthening communications from vocational tutors to students about the value of these subjects to their studies as well as their employment prospects.

To address issues of exam team resources and learner success rates following the GCSE reforms, the college is reviewing its exam boards. From September 2016 the college is keen to select a single exam board for its new GCSEs in order to reduce the administrative and teaching burden of following a number of different processes and syllabi. This decision is likely to be driven by the organisation offering the "*most accessible*" exams in order to support student success rates. The college is also keen to explore the potential to increase the number of assessment windows and for the examinations to be taken online. Such changes would make the qualification more flexible and better meet the needs of learners and employers.

A final issue raised by the college was the lack of government communication about how the grade D GCSE learner would be reflected in the new grading system. Staff are concerned about whether the 9-1 grading will affect the proportion of learners needing to continue their GCSE English and/or maths and whether the resourcing changes put in place to meet the condition of funding will meet the demand.

CTS Training

About CTS Training

CTS Training is a private training provider with numerous sites in South Yorkshire. It delivers a number of specialised programmes including those to support 16-18 year old NEETS, unemployed adults and work-based learning apprenticeships. CTS Training offers provision on a roll-on roll-off basis. It is experienced in delivering Functional Skills as part of its study programmes and will start delivering GCSE English and maths from September 2015.

Effect of English and maths reforms

In its submission of evidence about the new GCSEs, CTS Training indicated that the reforms would affect it in a number of ways, including its business model, the learning experience of its customers, and its teaching capacity.

The reforms have had number of implications for CTS Training's business model which is roll-on roll-off provision. These include:

- The dilemma of whether to allow students to enrol post-December given the challenge of assisting them to achieve a GCSE grade C in less than six months;
- The difficulty of filling training places left by students who abandon their studies as single cohort of learners will present fewer recruitment opportunities;
- The challenge of supporting learners to progress whilst maintaining retention rates. As GCSEs only have two assessment windows, learners ready to progress in their training or into employment at a different time of year will negatively affect CTS Training's retention rate if they are allowed to progress without sitting their GCSE exam; and,
- The test of communicating its distinctiveness to potential learners. It has previously provided an alternative learning experience for school or college leavers but will now be providing the same GCSE English and maths studies as other providers.

The staff interviewed believe the scope and personalisation of learners' study programmes are limited by the reforms and this will have a negative impact on learners' motivation and retention. Historically, CTS Training would enrol learners on the vocational elements of their study programmes first as these are perceived to be more engaging, before adding the requisite English and/or maths courses. CTS Training staff feel they will now have to disregard other elements of their customers' learning and reduce their own ability to engage them in the benefits of learning in order to concentrate on English and maths to meet the condition of funding.

Staff at CTS Training also believe that the time commitment of the GCSE level, both in intensity and length, will be challenging for their learners. In addition to their vocational courses, learners will be required to study four hours of English and/or maths per week.

Staff are also concerned that the increase in the English and maths requirements of the Early Years apprenticeship framework is limiting the potential employment and career options of learners who are vocationally very able and yet face more challenges academically. However, staff at CTS Training do recognise that the reforms to GCSE English and maths provide their existing learners who have already attained level 2 Functional Skills with an additional progression option and ensure the learner is better prepared for employment or apprenticeships.

The reforms have had an effect on the teaching capacity of CTS Training in two ways. Firstly, it has sought to improve the capacity of its teaching staff to address the greater focus on GCSE English and maths and the potential increase in demand. Secondly, its vocational training is currently taught at level 1 which it does not believe will be sufficiently challenging for learners studying GCSE English and/or maths.

Actions taken

CTS Training has made several changes to its English and maths provision to meet the condition of funding from September 2015 for students with a D grade in the subjects. These include altering its model for training provision, increasing its teaching capacity, and seeking ways to guarantee the motivation and engagement of its learners.

CTS Training has adapted its troll-on roll-off provision. From September 2015, it will run a two pronged GCSE programme as follows for school leavers predicted a grade D and its existing learners who have achieved a level 2: a short programme culminating in the November re-sit assessment window for learners who achieve a D grade in June 2015; and a longer programme running up until the June re-sit assessment window for CTS Training's previous level 2 learners and new learners who have not undertaken any GCSE activity before.

For any learners who enter the system after September but before February/March, CTS Training plans to try to absorb them into the existing classes whilst running some catch up lessons for those learners. For any learners enrolling after February/March the quality officer believes that CTS Training "*would have to take the hit*" on funding by planning for their assessment to take place the following summer and deliver an alternative course to them in the intervening period to engage and retain them. This is the alternative to refusing an applicant which CTS Training is disinclined to do.

In response to the anticipated increase in GCSE English and maths learners CTS Training has created two new roles. There is now a dedicated GCSE English tutor and a dedicated GCSE maths tutor who work across CTS Training's multiple sites.

CTS Training has also taken measures to ensure the vocational courses followed by GCSE English and/or maths learners are sufficiently challenging. From September 2015 vocational training such as personal and social development as well as employability skills will be available at level 2.

Perceived impact of changes

CTS Training starts its GCSE English and maths teaching in September 2015 so has not witnessed any impacts yet. However, it has identified two potentially negative impacts on learners as a result of the changes it is putting in place: learners could be prevented from progressing to a new training or employment opportunity until they have sat their GCSE English and/or maths exams CTS training is more sensitive to retention rates for the condition of funding which may mean; and, learners who struggle to achieve the new GCSE English and maths requirements of the Early Years apprenticeship framework will not be able to progress into the sector even if they are vocationally capable.

Future plans

For CTS Training there are a number of unresolved questions it needs to address in 2015/16 about the impact of delivering GCSE English and maths to learners with a grade D in the subjects. Firstly, what is the proportion of learners seeking to enrol post CTS Training's proposed cut-off date of February/March and how best can it accommodated them? Secondly, what will the demand be for grade D English and maths learners wishing to continue their studies at CTS Training and will the organisation's resources be able to meet this demand?

Greenbank College

About Greenbank College

Greenbank is a small Further Education College in Liverpool, with approximately 150 learners aged 16-18 years and around 500 learners aged 19+. The College is run by Greenbank, a registered charity, which caters to disabled and other disadvantaged groups of learners. 60 per cent of learners aged 16-24 years at Greenbank College have Education Health and Care Plans. The College has delivered adult literacy and numeracy for a number of years and they currently deliver Functional Skills, having been involved in the piloting of the scheme. While the College will offer the new GCSE qualifications from September 2015, they intend to continue to deliver Functional Skills for learners who are working at Entry Levels.

Effect of English and maths reforms

The College will deliver GCSE English and maths for the first time in September 2015. They are making these changes to their offer mainly in response to the condition of funding to deliver GCSE English and maths qualifications who have previously achieved a Grade D in these subjects. The College recognises that GCSE qualifications are also particularly important for learners working towards Level 3 qualifications and aim to progress to Higher Education courses at other institutions.

The College will make GCSE English and maths courses available to adult learners who are assessed to be working at an appropriate level, as well as learners who have completed a Level 2 Functional Skills qualification and would like to progress to the GCSE.

The College will continue to deliver Functional Skills English and maths, and have some concern that the drive towards GCSE qualifications may devalue Functional Skills. Learners who have completed a Level 2 Functional Skills qualification may feel as though they have been given mixed messages and that their qualification does not hold as much value as a GCSE, while others may lose motivation.

Actions taken

The College has a Functional Skills Strategy Group, which includes the Education and Curriculum Manager, Functional Skills Coordinator, English and maths teachers and the Quality Assurance Manager. In preparation for delivering GCSE English and maths, the group developed and have been implementing an action plan.

The College has increased its teaching capacity for English by half. It has also accessed the Government's recruitment grant to employ a maths graduate. They feel they would not have been able to offer GCSE English and maths without this increase in staff. The English and maths team has also been reorganised so that the tutors teaching GCSE will

only teach the higher level Functional Skills classes, so they benefit from any parallel content in the qualifications. Other tutors will concentrate on the Entry Level 1 to Entry Level 3 courses.

Perceived impact of changes

The College feels as though it is too early to know what the impact of the changes they have made will be, especially as they will be delivering GCSE for the first time. They are planning to start with small cohorts of learners, approximately 10-15 in each subject. Due to the timing of GCSE results being released, it has been difficult for the College to estimate the number of learners they will enrol on GCSE courses.

As the College intends to continue to offer Functional Skills alongside GCSE courses, this has put some pressure on timetabling. Linked to this, the size of the qualification and the number of guided learning hours has also caused some concern as the college is unsure whether it can effectively deliver this within one year. This is particularly the case for learners on study programmes, whose vocational programmes may be more substantial thus leaving little time for English and maths classes. As the College does not offer other qualifications above a Level 3, they do not expect to be able to retain learners beyond their one year programme.

However, the college recognises that offering GCSE qualifications may bring additional benefits. For example, learners who want to progress to these qualifications will be able to do so without moving another provider and the College may be able to enrol them on Level 3 programmes.

Future plans

The College has selected the Awarding Organisation for their GCSE qualifications. At this time, they feel the examination process and papers are an 'unknown quantity' as they have not yet seen any example papers. As the process for examination is different to Functional Skills, they will make plans during the year to support this, including arranging invigilation and quiet exam rooms. The college is also aware that the mindset that the learners will need for the examination process will be different, and it may be a process that does not suit some of their learners due to learning difficulties and previous experiences of education and examinations.

Hull Training and Adult Education

About Hull Training and Adult Education

Hull Training and Adult Education is a large learning provider based in the Yorkshire and Humber region offering a broad spectrum of provision, including apprenticeships, study programmes, adult and community learning and English and maths. They deliver education and training to over 8,000 learners and employers a year across 100 learning and community centres in Hull. The majority of Hull Training and Adult Education's English and maths learners are at Entry Level and, as such, their English and maths provision is mostly delivered through Functional Skills. However, the recent emphasis on GCSEs has resulted in a steady increase in demand for courses at this level amongst their 16-19 and 19+ cohorts.

Effect of English and maths reforms

In their response to the initial consultation, Hull Training and Adult Education were concerned that the assessment structure of the new GCSE may disadvantage those who prefer coursework and adult learners with family or work commitments. In addition, the organisation was concerned that staff were not confident in their skills to deliver GCSE or to contextualise this qualification for vocational learners.

A year on, and the most significant reforms for Hull Training and Adult Education have been the changes to apprenticeships and the conditions of funding related to 16-18 learners. The inclusion of GCSE in the Early Years apprenticeship framework has had a significant negative impact on their enrolments. Staff were also anticipating challenges in motivating 16-18 learners with a D grade to continue to study GCSE. The low skilled economy in Hull means that learners and their parents often have low aspirations and see little need to succeed at GCSE. In addition, many of the local employers are SMEs that value work-related skills over academic qualifications.

The management team were concerned about their ability to attract and retain new teachers who are qualified to deliver GCSE, particularly given the shortage of maths teachers in local secondary schools. Senior staff also felt that the requirement to deliver GCSE was likely to have an impact on the organisation's overall income, as providers cannot draw down much more funding for GCSE than Functional Skills.

Actions taken

Hull Training and Adult Education has been piloting GCSE courses for the last three years and developed a new English and Maths Manager role to ensure a coherent approach to delivery across the organisation. The GCSE pilots were led by the Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Leads for English and Maths who were shadowed by Functional Skills teachers. This was complemented by attendance on the English and

Maths Enhancement Programmes, which staff then cascaded back to the rest of the team. The organisation has also recruited a graduate maths teacher through the government's graduate recruitment incentive scheme. The organisation now has a team able to deliver at both GCSE and Functional Skills levels, which will enable them to respond to the needs of the 2015/16 learner cohort.

Hull Training and Adult Education's CPD for their teachers has also been supported by their Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Humber LEP has set up a project group on English and maths, led by the Lead Manager for Community and Vocational Training at Hull Training and Adult Education, to facilitate collaborative partnership work. This group identified a need to grow their own talent in the delivery of GCSE English and maths and put together a successful joint bid to the European Social Fund, enabling them to provide training for Functional Skills tutors across the region.

Perceived impact of changes

Both management and teaching staff agreed that, thus far, the reforms had had little impact on Hull Training and Adult Education's learner profile. The exception to this is the Early Years apprenticeship programme, the number of enrolments onto which has dropped significantly since the introduction of the reforms.

The most significant impact that the reforms have had for the organisation so far has been on the confidence and skills of teaching staff to deliver GCSE. CPD for staff has been well-received, enabling teachers to share innovative practice and increasing their engagement with the drive towards GCSE. This has in turn improved the quality of the organisation's GCSE delivery.

The organisation's strong involvement with Humber LEP's English and maths project group has enabled them to facilitate a Humber-wide conversation about policy changes. Furthermore, the LEP has suggested to the Skills Funding Agency that the Humber region be a test site for policy changes, giving Hull Training and Adult Education an opportunity to directly influence future reforms in the FE sector.

Future plans

To estimate the size of the GCSE cohort for the 2015/16 year, the organisation is intending to undertake a mapping exercise using attainment and destination data from recent academic years. Teaching staff are preparing to demonstrate the relevance and importance of GCSE, particularly to those on vocational courses, to increase learner motivation to engage with these qualifications. Teachers are also considering the different delivery models they might need to develop in order to support learners with D grades to achieve, such as blended learning approaches.

Many of the training providers across Hull are small and are likely to struggle to deliver GCSE. Hull Training and Adult Education anticipate working with small providers to

deliver the English and maths elements of their vocational programmes once the new funding requirements are brought in.

Kingston College

About Kingston College

Kingston College is a large college of further and higher education situated in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. The college offers both academic and vocational courses to suit learners in a wide-range of subject areas. Approximately 2600 learners are on study programmes of which around 700 are studying Functional Skills and 600 are studying GCSE English and maths. All English and maths provision is delivered by subject specialists with the teaching teams consisting of 15 tutors across both subjects. Some tutors deliver only GCSE, while others specialise in Functional Skills. The majority of tutors hold subject specific PGCE qualifications and a number have experience of delivering GCSEs in compulsory education.

Effect of English and maths reforms

In the consultation prior to the reforms, the college noted that the majority of its students did not have a Grade C in English or maths. The college thus envisioned increasing its English and maths provision to accommodate learners required to enrol on GCSE courses, and intended to explore a range of activities to prepare and support staff with the delivery of these courses.

For the last two years, learners on a full-time programme of study with a Grade D in English and/or maths from school have been enrolled on to the GCSE course. This is an intensive one-year course, delivered over four hours per week. Learners with a Grade E or below are placed on a Functional Skills course initially, also four hours per week, and may, following an assessment at six weeks, move on to the GCSE course. For a small minority of learners who have never sat GCSEs, diagnostic tools are used to determine the most appropriate course of study. The college will start delivering the reformed GCSEs in English and maths from 2016/17.

Actions taken

The college has created a number of new roles designed to support the delivery of English and maths. Team Leaders have been put in place to support teaching teams, whilst Data Analysts and Attendance Monitors facilitate tracking, monitoring and attendance of learners. An E-Learning Coordinator has also been appointed to work collaboratively across departments to develop effective and engaging digital resources for both tutors and learners.

The college has supported staff and fostered effective cross-college communication by: encouraging English and maths tutors to engage vocational tutors in continued professional development (CPD) activities; enabling staff to explore alternative teaching and learning methods, including digital resources; establishing an English and Maths

Forum which brings staff together to share best practice on a regular basis; and, increasing the frequency of communications between the Senior Management Team and teaching staff. In addition, the college has been working closely with the Sixth Form Forum and local schools to ensure that the changes to English and maths provision are effective.

The college has supported learners studying English and maths by: setting up monthly workshops delivered by subject specialist tutors that offer additional support in English and maths; increasing the number and availability of key skills resources available in each teaching room; and, investing in additional digital resources, including subscriptions to MathsWatch and the MathsWatch virtual learning environment (VLE).

In preparation for delivering reformed GCSEs in 2016/17 a number of staff have attended CPD events and completed online training sessions. Staff are currently reviewing qualification specifications from different awarding bodies and are undertaking a mapping exercise to explore whether changes to the delivery model need to be made, particularly in light of upcoming A-Level reforms.

Perceived impact of changes

The changes introduced two years ago have led to much higher numbers of learners being enrolled on to maths and English provision (both GCSE and Functional Skills). This has had some significant implications for planning, co-ordination and delivery.

Initially, there was some resistance from learners who were now required to study for the GCSE. Staff found it challenging in some instances to explain the reasons why learners were required to complete English and maths alongside other qualifications. As a result, the college reassessed its communications with learners and ensured that all information – including the requirement to complete English and maths, and explanations regarding the diagnostic testing and streaming process – was presented clearly and at an appropriate time. Although learners are now more likely to know that they will be required to continue studying these subjects at college, ongoing work is needed – and planned – to improve learner attendance and motivation.

The move to full adoption of the GCSE reforms has created some uncertainty among staff, particularly with regard to the guided learning hours (GLH). Subject specialist English and maths tutors are concerned about how they will be able to effectively deliver the GCSEs in a 12-month period, especially considering the resistance described above. It was also noted that there may be some logistical and practical issues in relation to the first cohort of learners taking the reformed GCSEs due to staff and learners acclimatising to new ways of teaching and learning.

Future plans

Following the mapping exercise, Team Leaders and Tutors will be attending further training and events, including bespoke training sessions offered by Awarding Organisations (AO). The intention is to select the AO for GCSEs by the end of the 2015/16 academic year.

Whole-college CPD events will continue to run, focusing upon English and maths with material promoting the importance and relevance of these skills to be disseminated and displayed across the college. It is hoped this will then contribute to improved cross-departmental communication.

Communication with learners and their parents will also be enhanced. This will focus particularly on the nature of the changes to GCSE provision, the new grading system that will be implemented and the strict entry criteria for Level 3 courses. The latter condition ties in with the upcoming A-Level reforms and the college are aware of the need for clarity to ensure learners fully understand the implications of the reforms.

There will also be an increased focus on bridging the gap from Functional Skills Level 1 to GCSE courses as it was felt that additional support and preparation may be required to allow these learners to make the step up to GCSE. Workshops and other support mechanisms are being considered to facilitate this transition.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE-RR739

ISBN: 978-1-78105-807-7

This research was commissioned under the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy. The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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